

**Faculty of Business and Law
School of Management**

**Exploring Strategic Human Resource Management in the Saudi
Arabian Higher Education Sector**

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**The thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of
Curtin University**

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014. The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number: HRE2017-0005

Signature:

Date: January 2020

Abstract

The thesis encompasses three research objectives relating to strategic human resource management (HRM) development within the Saudi Arabian higher education sector.

Objective one explores tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR practices and processes in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions. Objective two explores equity among Saudi national and foreign-born academic staff in a university work setting through the lens of how HRD opportunities are administered. Objective three examines the relationship between human resource practices, trust in peers, knowledge sharing and academic research output in Saudi Arabian higher education sector.

The thesis employs mixed methods research design including qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative research design was used to collect data from twenty-eight (28) qualitative, in-depth interviews of participants from six Saudi universities. The quantitative data collection was conducted through an online survey using Qualtrics online software (www.qualtrics.com). The sample used in the quantitative was drawn from all 28 publicly funded universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Results for objective one indicate that much of HR practices and processes are devolved to deans and heads of schools and colleges, which creates power struggles and duplication of HRM functions. Lack of both recognition of HR units and coordination among HR units and faculties indicated the limited application of strategic HRM. In addition, the results uncovered several tensions and challenges that hinder progress toward a strategic HRM focus and people development in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector.

The findings for objective two identified nationality differences in the levels of HRD support provided, highlighting the notion of one glass, different shapes. These differences are reinforced by practices associated with procedural processes, managerial discretion, and selective restrictions in accessing HRD opportunities. The variations in HRD support have generated perceived inequity that undermines knowledge-transfer capabilities in Saudi

Arabian universities. The results for objective three suggested a positive relationship between human resource practices and academic research output, trust in peers and knowledge sharing act as mediators between these two factors.

The findings of the research are valuable for aligning strategic HRM processes and practices to build the human capital of Saudi higher education institutions. The alignment and integration of HRM processes and practices within these institutions would also advance national skill levels for the future demands of a growing economy. Also, the findings add to the literature on human resource practices and performance, particularly academic research output, by highlighting new evidence from the Middle East – an under-researched area in the literature on human resource management. The study has implications for both advancing human resource management practices and knowledge sharing in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector. Moreover, the findings have both practical and social implications for the Saudi Arabian Government's strategic vision of developing human capabilities and improving the capacity of the country's higher education institutions.

Keywords

Strategic HRM; human resource management; human resource devolvement; higher education; Saudi Arabia; training and development; equity theory; academic research output; trust in peers; knowledge sharing.

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Statement of Editorial Assistance

The author obtained professional copyediting and proofreading services for this thesis according to the guidelines laid out in *Guidelines for editing research theses* (Institute of Professional Editors, 2019) and endorsed by the Australian Council of Graduate Research.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis, and everything I have achieved or will achieve to my parents, brothers, sisters and family.

Research Outcomes from the Thesis

Journal Papers

- Alqahtani, M., D. T. Ayentimi, K. Dayaram, and K. Pedigo. (2019). The devolvement of HR practices in Saudi Arabian universities: exploring tensions and challenges. *Public Personnel Management*, (Under review, ID: PPM-19-0126). This paper is developed from Essay One. **Ranked B in Australian Business Deans Council.**
- Alqahtani, M., D. T. Ayentimi, K. Dayaram, and K. Pedigo. (2019). One glass, different shapes: Human resource development practices in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector. *Personnel Review*, (Under review, ID: PR-11-2019-0604). This paper is developed from Essay Two. **Ranked A in Australian Business Deans Council.**
- Alqahtani, M., D. T. Ayentimi, and K. Dayaram. (2019). HRM practices and academic research output: Evidence from the Saudi higher education sector. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance*, (Under review, ID: JOEPP-12-2019-0111). This paper is developed from Essay Three. **Ranked B in Australian Business Deans Council.**

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by Research Students' Colloquium 2016, Perth, 31 August to 1 September.

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List of Abbreviations

ARWU	Academic Ranking of World Universities–Shanghai
ASV	average shared variance
AVE	average variance extracted
CFA	confirmatory factor analysis
CV	convergent validity
CR	composite reliability
DV	discriminant validity
EFA	exploratory factor analysis
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRM	human resource management
HR	human resource(s)
HRD	human resource development
KAUST	King Abdullah University for Science and Technology
KSU	King Saud University
KAU	King Abdulaziz University
KKU	King Khalid University
KFUPM	King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals
MSV	maximum shared variance
PCA	principal component analysis
QS	Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings
Qual	qualitative
QUAN	quantitative
SEM	structural equation modelling

SD	standard deviation
SAR	Saudi Arabian Riyal

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter outline

This first chapter of the thesis provides an overview of the research problem and explains the research objectives. A summary of the results and evidence of the significant contribution, in the form of publications which form the basis of this research study, is included, along with an overview and explanation of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Statement of the problem and objectives of the thesis

Over the past decade, strategic HRM has increased in both credibility and popularity, specifically concerning its impact on organisational performance (Boon, Den, & Lepak, 2019; Paauwe & Boon, 2018; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003). Strategic HRM was developed in the mid-1980s as a field of management (Saridakis, Lai, & Cooper, 2017). It is defined as a model of organised human resource deployments and activities intended to empower a firm to achieve its goals (Wright & McMahan, 1992). Strategic HRM is an ongoing process to align HRM policies and practices with the business strategy of the firm (Boxall, Purcell, & Wright, 2007).

Every organisation, whether public or private, must work with and through people. Strategic HRM posits that human resources (HR) are the primary key to success in organisations. According to Delery and Shaw (2001), scholars generally agree that, first, human capital can give competitive advantage; second, that HR practices are the factor that rapidly affects a company's human capital; and, third, that the complex nature of HRM can contribute to a system's inimitability. Strategic HRM is mainly about integration and adaptation. It tries to guarantee that HRM is fully aligned with the strategic needs of the organisation, that HRM strategies fit across policy fields and hierarchies, and that line executives and staff adjust, accept and use HR procedures as part of their daily work (Altarawneh, 2016; Paauwe & Boon, 2018).

Strategic HRM research is dominated by applied studies within developed or advanced economic contexts (Al-Hamadi & Budhwar, 2006; Budhwar & Debrah, 2013; Moideenkutty, Al-Lamki, & Murthy, 2011). In developing countries, previous research describes the present HRM environment as facing many challenges: poor wage rates, absence of effective performance standards, failure to serve individual employees, lack of rewards for good performance, hiring processes that do not attract adequately qualified individuals, promotion models focused on seniority or patronage rather than performance, insufficient and demoralising supervisory management (unsuccessful leadership) and absence of challenging tasks (Cohen &

Wheeler, 1997; Grindle & Hilderbrand, 1995; Mussie Teclemichael & Soeters, 2006). Most developing countries are stuck in obsolete and failing HRM structures that create undesirable roadblocks (Bennell, 1994; Budhwar & Debrah, 2013; Mellahi, 2006). Therefore, to implement the theories and conceptualisations of strategic HRM in developing economy or country contexts such as that of Saudi Arabia will require a leapfrog into advanced HRM practices and processes. This transition may cause inadvertent tensions and implementation challenges associated with, for example, redesigning HRM practices, improving staff training and development, and building managerial capabilities. Before implementing new practices, the current HRM contextual practices must be examined and understood.

The Saudi Arabian higher education sector operates within an institutionalised distinction between Saudi nationals and non-Saudi academic staff in various ways. For instance, Saudi nationals are granted tenured positions with a high level of job security and fixed annual wage increments. Also, the salaries of Saudi academic staff are determined by the length of service and rank, not job performance. In contrast, non-Saudi academic staff are assigned non-permanent positions characterised by renewable contracts, negotiable wages and fringe benefits that depend on their field of expertise, qualifications and market demands (Alkhazim, 2003). In addition, the salaries of Saudi academic staff are higher than those of their equivalent non-Saudi colleagues. Saudi universities recruit non-Saudi academic staff to fill a shortfall in academic appointments and to improve the quality of Saudi higher education in various domains such as research outcomes, teaching outcomes, and community services (Al-Shehri et al., 2013). The workload of, and expectations placed on, both Saudi and non-Saudi academic staff are the same (*Statute Governing the Employment of Non-Saudis at Universities* 1996). Therefore, exploring equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered will help determine the current situation and what needs to change.

If Saudi universities want to improve the quality of higher education and achieve the Vision 2030 aim outlined above, they will need to invest in their

staff. The research evidence to date demonstrates that the HR system is an important element in assisting an organisation to become more productive and perform better (Hailey, Farndale, & Truss, 2005; Nguyen & Teo, 2018). Prior research support the relationship between HRM practices and organisational performance (Boon et al., 2019; Paauwe & Boon, 2018). However, most research on HRM and performance has been carried out in developed contexts or countries (Liu & Liu, 2011; Moideenkutty et al., 2011; Saheem, Darwish, & Al-Nasser, 2017). In addition, the studies have focused mainly on the private sector (Giauque, Anderfuhren, & Varone, 2013) and measured financial performance (Ko & Smith, 2013; Paauwe, 2009). Thus, generalising the findings and applying the resultant theories in developing settings or countries is difficult; many domains such as HRM systems, culture and context differ markedly (Cooke, 2018). Similarly, applying lessons from private-sector studies to the public-sector context is problematic (Knies, Boselie, Williams, & Vandenabeele, 2017). Further, evidence from the university context about the relationship between HRM and performance is limited, especially in developing settings (Amin, Wan, Siti, & Richard, 2014). Therefore, the relationship between HRM and university performance in the Saudi higher education context warrants examination.

Several researchers support the need for more research in the Middle East region (Moideenkutty et al., 2011; Saheem et al., 2017). Saudi Arabia is strategically and politically important within the international business environment. Multinational businesses have invested highly in the country. Hence, there is the need to understand both how HRM practices and processes are operationalised and the opportunities available to advance strategic HRM. In addition, because the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), including Saudi Arabia, rely heavily on foreign-born workers, exploring equity among national and non-national staff is crucial. It is also important to examine the relationship between HRM practices and university performance.

To investigate these aspects of HRM in the context of the Saudi Arabian higher education sector, this doctoral research centred on three research objectives:

- To explore tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions.
- To explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how (HRD) opportunities are administered.
- To examine the link between HRM practices and university performance.

1.3 Summary of results and significance of contributions

The first research objective explores tensions and challenges associated with the development of HRM practices and processes in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions. The findings have several implications for reforming Saudi Arabia's workforce into a more strategic HRM model with processes and practices that build human capital for higher education institutions. The study found several tensions and challenges that hinder progress toward a strategic HRM focus and delay people development in Saudi Arabia. Also, the findings support the alignment and integration of HRM processes and practices within Saudi Arabia's higher education institutions to advance national skill levels for the future demands of a growing economy. The study showed that the current HRM practices within the Saudi higher education may lack the capacity to build a world-class staff base in order to improve teaching and research. The study indicates the need for Saudi higher education to create a well-designed and well-governed HRM environment that can support Saudi universities to attract high-quality staff. The HRM processes should provide the appointed staff with appropriate training and development programs and reward schemes to improve the quality of research output and teaching and learning.

The second research objective explores equity among Saudi national and foreign-born academic staff in a university work setting through the lens of how HRD opportunities are administered. This study contributes to the contextual body of knowledge about HRD in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector, given the scarcity of HRD literature in GCC settings (Moideenkutty et

al., 2011; Saheem et al., 2017). In particular, it highlights localisation policies such as the “Saudisation” process that underpins HRD. In addition, this study’s implications for HRD may extend to other GCC contexts, given that these countries also tend to rely heavily on foreign labour. With the aging of the population and declining fertility rates in the region, reliance on and competition for foreign labour may increase. Therefore, workplace equity issues around practices associated with foreign labour are gaining prominence. The study demonstrated that inequity in people management at Saudi universities explicitly undermines the ability of foreign-born workers to share knowledge. This issue has long-term implications for building the institutional and human capacity of Saudi universities. In personal terms, the perceived inequity in Saudi universities might contribute to psychological strain in non-Saudi academic staff. This pressure, in turn, may diminish their job satisfaction and dedication. This trickle-down effect will hinder the government’s commitment to building influential education organisations for global recognition and the development of Saudi national human capital.

The third research objective examines the relationship between HRM practices and university performance. The existing empirical research on the relationship between HRM practices and organisational performance has been conducted primarily in Western countries, and predominantly within private-sector organisations. This study extends the analysis to the higher education context in an Asian country where the culture and the institutional setting differ markedly from those of Western countries. The study contributes to the literature on HR practices and performance, especially academic research output, by providing unique evidence from the Middle East region, which is relatively under-researched in the HRM literature. In addition, the study has implications for both advancing HRM practices and knowledge sharing in Saudi Arabia’s higher education sector.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured as six chapters (Figure 1-1).

Chapter 1 provides the introduction to and an overview of the thesis. The chapter also presents the research problem and objectives, a summary of the

findings, statements of significance, and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It discusses the geography, demographics, the structure of the Saudi government, and the economy of Saudi Arabia. The chapter also explains the culture, traditions and religion of Saudi Arabia. In addition, it examines the background of Saudi higher education, including the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program. Further, the chapter provides an explanation of the Saudi Vision 2030. Finally, it presents an overview of the human resource department in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector.

Chapter 3 presents the study that investigated Objective 1 of the research program, "To explore tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions". The title of the chapter is "The devolvement of HR practices in Saudi Arabian universities: Exploring tensions and challenges". This research has been submitted as a paper to the journal *Public Personnel Management* and is currently under review.

The chapter starts by explaining the role of strategic HRM in aligning HRM with organisational strategy. The paper supports strategically aligning HRM processes and practices within Saudi Arabia's higher education institutions to advance national skill levels for the future demands of a growing economy. Next, the chapter explains the notion of HR devolvement and strategic HRM advancement, followed by an overview of the Saudi Arabian context. The chapter then presents the research methodology for the study, including the research philosophy, study design, selection of participants, case studies, data collection and data analysis. After presenting the study's findings, the chapter discusses their implications for strategic HRM alignment in Saudi Arabia. It concludes with a summary of the findings and directions for further research.

Chapter 4 presents the study that investigated Objective 2 of the research program, "To explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered". The title of the chapter

is “One glass, different shapes: Human resource development practices in Saudi Arabia’s higher education sector”. This research has been submitted as a paper to the journal *Personnel Review* and is currently under review.

The chapter begins by explaining the importance of foreign-born workers in Saudi Arabia’s economy in general and in the higher education sector in particular. Next, the chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the study, equity theory. The chapter then examines the leadership of HRD and HRM practices in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. The chapter presents the study methods employed and the study’s results before discussing the findings and their implications. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and notes the study’s limitations.

Chapter 5 presents the study that investigated Objective 3 of the research program, “To examine the link between HRM practices and university performance”. The title of the chapter is “HRM practices and academic research output: Evidence from the Saudi higher education sector”. This research has been submitted as a paper to the *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance* and is currently under review.

The chapter begins by explaining the linkage between HRM and performance, including in the context of Saudi Arabia. It discusses the various views on measuring academic research output before explaining the study’s theoretical basis and hypothesis development. Three topics are covered: HRM practices and performance (research output); HRM practices, knowledge sharing and academic research output; and HRM practices, trust, knowledge sharing and academic research output. The chapter explains the research method, which comprised qualitative and quantitative methods, the sample and data collection procedures, and the measurement of dependent, independent and control variables. The data analysis and results are followed by a discussion of their implications. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and future research directions.

Chapter 6 summarises the important findings from the empirical analysis of the research in terms of the three research objectives. Conclusions are drawn from these findings, and the implications and contributions of the research

summarised. The chapter concludes by discussing the scope of future research in the Saudi Arabian higher education context.

Chapters	Description
Chapter 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the research • Research problem addressed • Research questions & objectives
Chapter 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background of Saudi Arabia
Chapter 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 1 study: The devolvement of HR practices in Saudi Arabian universities: Exploring tensions and challenges
Chapter 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 2 study: One glass, different shapes: Human resource development practices in Saudi Arabia’s higher education sector
Chapter 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective 3 study: Human resource management practices and academic research output: Evidence from the Saudi higher education sector
Chapter 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the findings • Limitations of the study • Future research directions

Figure 1-1 Structure of the thesis

1.5 Chapter summary

The chapter provides an overview of the thesis. The chapter began by explaining the statement of the problem and the objective of the thesis. The thesis includes three separate but interlinked research studies (“objectives) relating to strategic HRM within the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. Also, this chapter outlined the results and the significance of contributions of each study or objective. Finally, the chapter explained the thesis outline.

The next chapter (Chapter 2) will discuss the study context of the research.

CHAPTER 2. STUDY CONTEXT

2.1 Chapter outline

The background of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is reviewed in this chapter. The literature review starts with a brief review of Saudi Arabia's geography. The second section clarifies the demographics of Saudi Arabia, which is followed by an explanation of the Saudi government structure and the economy of Saudi Arabia. The following section explains the culture, traditions and religion of Saudi Arabia, and is followed by a discussion of the background to the Saudi higher education system. The subsequent section discusses the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program of Saudi Arabia and the future of the scholarship program and Saudi higher education. The next section provides an explanation of the Saudi Vision 2030. The final section provides an overview of the human resource department in Saudi Arabia before concluding the chapter.

2.2 Geography of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia covers an area of approximately 2.15 million square kilometres within the South West of Asia. Geographically, Saudi Arabia is Asia's fifth-largest state and the Arab World's second-largest state (Vassiliev, 2013). The capital of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is Riyadh, with a population of 7,070,665 in 2019 (World Population Review, 2019).

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a strategic location because it is located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa. Figure 2-1 shows that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is surrounded in the west by the Red Sea, in the east by the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, in the north by Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait, and in the south by Yemen and Oman (World Population Review, 2019). Saudi Arabia's gulf coastline is around 560 kilometres (350 miles), while its Red Sea coastline stretches around 1760 kilometres (1100 miles) (Geography of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).



Figure 2-1 Map of Saudi Arabia

2.3 Demographics of Saudi Arabia

In 2019, the population was estimated at 34,117,380 (General Authority for Statistics, 2019). In 2018, the details of the population by nationality and gender was revealed by the General Authority for Statistics. The total population was 33,413,660, of which 12,645,033 were of non-Saudi origin (General Authority for Statistics, 2019). The population from 2018 to 2019 increased by 1.75% (World Population Review, 2019). Table 2-1

Table 2-1 Population by nationality (Saudi/Non-Saudi) and gender

Nationality	Total	Female	Male
	33,413,660	14,172,704	19,240,956
Non-Saudi	12,645,033	3,979,972	8,665,061
Saudi	20,768,627	10,192,732	10,575,895

Created by the author. Source: General Authority for Statistics (2019).

In terms of gender of non-Saudi inhabitants, females are fewer than males. Females account for only 31.47%, while males account for approximately 68.53% (Table 2-1). Males account for approximately 51% of the population of Saudi nationals and females account for approximately 49%. Non-Saudis cannot obtain citizenship of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They may only obtain visas during their stay in the kingdom and have to leave the country when the visa expires if it is not renewed (Peck, 2017).

The population is divided into three age groups. The first age group from 0 to 14 years forms 32.4% of the total population. The second age group from 15 to 64 years comprises around 64.8% of the total and constitutes the greatest share of the total population. The age group of 65 years and above forms only 2.8% of the total population (World Population Review, 2019). The mean sex ratio for the total population is 1.21 males per female but the sex ratio is 1.05 males per female at birth. The ratio for the age group under 15 years is 1.05

males per female. For the second age group (15 to 64), the ratio is 1.03 males per female. Finally, for the age group 65 and above, the ratio is 1.03 males per female.

Saudi Arabia’s population is equivalent to 0.43% of the global population and is ranked number 41 by population in the list of countries (and dependencies) (Worldometers, 2016). Table 2-2 shows that the Saudi Arabian population has increased yearly. For instance, in 1990, the population was 16,326,815 and the country ranked 51 on the list of countries by population. By 2010, the population had increased to 27,425,676, and the country jumped to number 45 on the list. In 2019, the population reached 34,117,380 and the country was number 41 on the list. The World Population Review (2019) expects that the population will increase to reach 39.1 million by the end of 2030, and 47.7 million by 2060. However, the Review expects that the growth rate will decrease to 1.09 by the year 2030, and further to 0.277 by the year 2060.

Table 2-2 Population of Saudi Arabia by year (historical)

Year	Population	Population Rank	Growth Rate
2019	34,117,380	41	1.75%
2018	33,413,660	41	1.87%
2017	32,938,213	41	2.05%
2016	32,275,687	41	2.28%
2015	31,557,144	41	2.85%
2010	27,425,676	45	2.79%
2005	23,905,654	46	2.86%
2000	20,764,312	48	2.08%
1995	18,735,841	48	2.79%
1990	16,326,815	51	4.36%

Source: World Population Review (2019).

2.4 Government structure

In 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded by Abdulaziz Al-Saud. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's constitution is based on Quran and Sharia law. In addition, it is an absolute monarchy and the King is also the Head of State, the Prime Minister, and the Supreme Commander. Royal decrees have the power to abolish any judicial or administrative decision. The King performs legislative, judicial and administrative roles. In compliance with this situation and with other legislation, the authorities work together to carry out their duties. However, the King is the main arbiter for these authorities (Governance & Politics of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

The executive authority, the official executive branch of the government, is formed by the Council of Ministers. All members of this Council are appointed and dismissed by royal decree. The Council comprises members of the royal family and non-royal family, appointed every 4 years. Currently, there are 22 government ministers (Governance & Politics of Saudi Arabia, 2019). This council is recognised as the supreme executive authority and is responsible for all management and executive matters. It has responsibility for monitoring regulatory implementation by laws and resolutions, establishing and coordinating public sectors, monitoring the execution of the general development plan, and setting up oversight committees for conduct of business by ministries and agencies.

The legislative authority, the unicameral legislature, is named the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council). This Council has 150 members and a chairman. All of them are chosen by the King and appointed and for a period of 4 years. At least half of them must be new members. The King can restructure or dissolve the Council as he sees fit. The Consultative Council has approximately twelve committees, which include those for human rights, education, culture, information, health and social affairs, services and public utilities, foreign affairs, security, administration, Islamic affairs, economy and industry, and finance (Governance & Politics of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

The primary role of the Consultative Council is to give advice to the King on policy issues, including domestic and international policies and treaties. The policies are initiated by the Council based on a royal call or members or

citizens. The decision is taken based on the majority of the Council and then forwarded to the Prime Minister (the King or his deputy) for consideration by the Council of Ministers. Both councils (the Council of Ministries and the Consultative Council) agree on a decision, which is sent to the King for approval. However, if there is disagreement between these two councils, the King will decide what is good and appropriate (Governance & Politics of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

The third authority in Saudi Arabia is the judicial system, which is based mainly on Sharia (Islamic law). The authority is completely independent and subject to mainly Islamic jurisdiction (Governance & Politics of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

Four levels of courts form the Saudi court system. First, there are the Sharia courts, which deal with the majority of cases in the legal system. Second, there are the general courts, which deal with the rulings on criminal matters, tort actions, real estate, and family law matters. The third level is civil claims, which deals with offices of the governorates to settle disputes through arbitration. If this fails, the cases are filed with the courts. The court of appeal is the final court level. By majority decision, three or more judges settle disputes. The Board of Grievances handles matters pertaining to the government. The third branch in the legal system consists of the different committees of government ministries and chambers of commerce that decide on legal disputes such as labour matters (Governance & Politics of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

2.4.1 Local government

Currently, Saudi Arabia has thirteen provinces, which are further divided into governorates. The governorates are divided into municipalities. The thirteen provinces are distributed around the country, and include Mecca (Makkah), Riyadh, the Eastern Province (al-Sharqiya), Asir, Medina (al-Madina), Jazan, alQassim, Tabuk, Hail, Najran, al-Jawf, al-Baha, and the Northern Borders Province (Mintaqat al-Hudud al-Shamaliya) (Governance & Politics of Saudi Arabia, 2019). The King appoints the governors and deputies of each province based on a recommendation of the Minister of Interior. The majority

of the governors and deputies are from the royal family. In relation to the municipalities, there are elections for half of the seats in the municipal council. Both men and women are allowed to vote and stand for election. The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs is responsible for the administration of all municipal governance (Governance & Politics of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

2.5 Economy of Saudi Arabia

The economy is largely dependent on the production of crude oil and the Saudi government is a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Saudi Arabia has the largest underground oil reservoir and is one of the biggest global oil exporters (Cole, 2015). Saudi Arabia also has the fifth-largest gas reserves in the world, and globally is the ninth-largest producer of natural gas (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2019). Recently, the Saudi government created Vision 2030, which outlines the long-term objectives and aspirations of the country and represents its strengths and capabilities (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). Vision 2030 is built on three pillars: a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation. The pillars draw on the resources of the country to help the Saudi people to achieve their aspirations (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

Currently, Saudi Arabia is actively working toward reducing its reliance on oil revenues and is therefore seeking to diversify its economy and build other sources of income, which resonates with the pillars of the 2030 Vision (Jouini, 2018). Saudi Arabia is trying to boost its economy by focusing on four main factors: rewarding opportunities, open for business, investing for the future, and leveraging its unique position (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

In terms of the first factor, “rewarding opportunities”, the abilities of the younger generations are one of the most significant and valued assets of the country. To reward younger generations, the country will develop a culture that values ambition and fosters their abilities and resources to help them realise their potential. To this end, the country will improve its economy in

order to create real employment opportunities for young Saudis and to attract international talent (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). The second factor is “open for business”, which means that Saudi Arabia will improve its business climate, restructure its economic cities, create specific regions to make the energy market more competitive, and deregulate the market. In other words, the country will expand its investment opportunities to boost productivity and hasten its path to becoming one of the biggest global economies (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). The third factor is “investing for the future”, which means that the government is trying to create a sustainable, diverse economy for its long-term plans. Hence, the country aims to improve its position among the world’s twenty largest economies. In addition, it aims to privatise government services. The last factor is “leveraging its unique position”. Saudi Arabia is strategically located at the crossroads of significant international trade routes among three continents: Asia, Europe and Africa. This unique geographic position will contribute to the Saudi economy by allowing new strategic partnerships to grow its influence and assist Saudi firms to increase export of their products (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

2.6 Culture, traditions and religion of Saudi Arabia

The culture of Saudi Arabia is described by its Islamic heritage, historical role as an ancient trade centre, and Bedouin traditions (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). Saudi traditions are grounded in Islamic principles and Arab customs. However, Saudi culture has developed and adapted to the modern world, from the values, traditional customs and hospitality to the style of dressing (Aldossary, While, & Barriball, 2008; Culture, Traditions and Art, 2019).

Saudi Arabia’s official language is Arabic. Arabic is also the main language of other Arab countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa, including the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon (Albirini, 2016). Arabic is now one of the world’s most widely spoken languages. Additionally, more than 200 million Arabic speakers are

present in more than 20 other countries (Albirini, 2016). However, recently English has been recognised as a significant language and is commonly spoken by “formally educated” Saudis as a second language in Saudi Arabia. Socioeconomic development has taken place in Saudi Arabia to conform with Islamic principles (Budhwar, Mellahi, Branine, & Pollard, 2010; Littlewood & Yousuf, 2000). The leading code for the Islamic religion is the Holy Quran (The Islam holy book) and Hadith (recorded sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). Saudi nationals practise only the religion of Islam (Aldossary et al., 2008). The two holy cities of Makkah and Medina are located in Saudi Arabia, which gives the country special standing in the Muslim world. Makkah is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and the focal point of the Hajj (Pilgrimage), which over three million Muslim pilgrims from around the world perform annually (Almasri, Ahmed, Turkestani, & Memish, 2019). Islamic practice is linked to spirit, behaviour, food, language and social traditions. Muslims believe that all incidents in this life derive from Allah (The Arabic name of God) (Akhtar, Arshad, Mahmood, & Ahmed, 2017; Rassool, 2000). For example, Muslims have faith and believe that Allah brings health, disease and death. Therefore, they do not consider illness as a kind of punishment, but rather as a way of expiation for the sins of an individual (Al-Shahri, 2002). Although Islam is the main factor that shapes Saudi Arabian culture, other factors such as economic status, education levels and environmental factors also contribute to shaping Saudi culture (Al-Shahri, 2002; Harbi, Thursfield, & Bright, 2017).

2.7 Background to Saudi Arabian higher education

2.7.1 Government higher education

In most Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, the main form of education was previously provided in Kuttabs (the Islamic schools attached to mosques). The main objectives of these schools were to ensure students memorised the holy book of the Quran and other religious texts and to teach writing and arithmetic (Alghafis, 1992; Alhebsi, Pettaway, & Waller, 2015). After unification of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 by King

Abdulaziz, a Directorate of Education was established to be responsible for all educational matters in the Kingdom. In 1954, the Directorate of Education became the Ministry of Education (Rugh, 2002).

The establishment of internal institutions began with the founding of the College of Shariah in Makkah in 1949, followed by the College of Education in Macca in 1952. The College of Shariah in Riyadh was established in 1953 and the College of Arabian Language in Riyadh in 1954. These colleges followed a number of curricula to prepare and produce qualified teachers for general education (Al-Karni, 1999). The increasing number of graduates highlighted the need to establish higher education in its modern form.

King Saud University was the first university in Saudi Arabia and was established by royal decree in 1957. It was only a single institution with 9 staff and 21 students (Saleh, 1986). Since that time, the number of students has continued to increase and the need to establish new universities arose. Four additional universities were established: the Islamic University in 1961, the King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals in 1963, the King Abdulaziz University in 1967, and the Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud University in 1974.

In 1975, the Ministry of Higher Education was established to manage universities; previously, all the universities had been managed by the Ministry of Education. From 1975 to 1999, only three universities were founded: King Faisal University in 1975, Umm Al-Qura University in 1981, and King Khalid University in 1999. Twenty-one publicly funded universities were subsequently established between 2003 and 2014 (Ministry of Education , 2019).

Currently, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has 42 universities, comprising 28 publicly funded universities, 13 private universities and 1 independent university. The 28 publicly funded universities are geographically distributed across the region (Table 2-3). King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) is listed as a public university in the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia. However, unlike the other public universities, which are controlled by the Ministry of Education (Higher Education

Council), KAUST is managed by its own Board of Trustees. Thus, KAUST operates as an independent university and is the first of this kind in Saudi Arabia; also, it is the first university in Saudi Arabia with a mixed-gender campus (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). Therefore, in this research, KAUST is considered an independent university rather than a public university.

Table 2-3 List of publicly funded universities in Saudi Arabia (historical order)

No.	Institution Name	Established Year	Specialisation	Total Male Staff	Total Female Staff	Total
1	King Saud University	1957	Teaching and Research	7,903	7,344	15,247
2	Islamic University	1961	Teaching and Research	1466	23	1489
3	King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals	1963	Teaching and Research	2118	55	2173
4	King Abdulaziz University	1967	Teaching and Research	4349	2929	7278
5	Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud University	1974	Teaching and Research	3046	2040	5086
6	King Faisal University	1975	Teaching and Research	1125	480	1605
7	Umm Al-Qura University	1981	Teaching and Research	1668	996	2664
8	King Khalid University	1999	Teaching and Research	2073	1422	3495
9	Taibah University	2003	Teaching and Research	1834	1308	3142
10	Taif University	2003	Teaching and Research	916	547	1463
11	Qassim University	2004	Teaching and Research	1947	1319	3266
12	University of Hail	2005	Teaching and Research	729	457	1186
13	AlJouf University	2005	Teaching and Research	544	367	911

14	King Saud bin Abdulaziz University of Health Sciences	2005	Teaching and Research	1729	992	2721
15	Jazan University	2006	Teaching and Research	989	709	1698
16	Al Baha University	2006	Teaching and Research	490	336	826
17	University of Tabuk	2006	Teaching and Research	657	397	1054
18	Najran University	2006	Teaching and Research	546	193	739
19	Northern Borders University	2007	Teaching and Research	509	261	770
20	Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University	2007	Teaching and Research	542	3499	4041
21	Shagra University	2008	Teaching and Research	670	372	1042
22	Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University	2009	Teaching and Research	1022	692	1814
23	Al-Majmaah University	2009	Teaching and Research	1383	701	2084
24	University of Dammam	2009	Teaching and Research	1393	2118	3911
25	Saudi Electronic University	2011	Teaching and Research	388	320	708
26	Jeddah University	2013	Teaching and Research	354	85	439
27	University of Bisha	2014	Teaching and Research	136	395	531
28	University of Hafr Al- Batin	2014	Teaching and Research	187	236	423

Blue = Foundation Phase; Green = Expansion Phase; Orange = Comprehensive Phase. Source: Ministry of Education (2019).

2.7.2 The growth of higher education in Saudi Arabia (government higher education)

In Saudi Arabia, higher education growth can be divided into three phases: the foundation, expansion and comprehensive phases (Table 2-3). In the foundation phase, four colleges were created between 1949 and 1960, followed in 1957 by the King Saud University. Six universities were created in the expansion phase between 1961 and 1981 to deliver education for students in various regions of the Kingdom. In the comprehensive phase of higher education that started in 1982, another 21 publicly funded universities were established in Saudi Arabia (Ismail, Lai, Ayub, Ahmad, & Wan, 2016).

In early 2015, the Education Ministry and the Higher Education Ministry were combined into a single ministry to administer all education matters (Ministry of Education, 2019). The aim of this merger was to reduce bureaucracy in the two previous ministries. The Ministry of Education prepares and manages the higher education needs of the Kingdom. The ministry encourages the creation of specialised research centres and organises scientific conferences and symposia, which allow university academic staff to engage in advanced research activities and keep up-to-date in their field (Ministry of Education , 2019).

In 2016, the Government of Saudi Arabia articulated a new sense of direction for the country, the Vision 2030. Part of the vision aims to make the higher education sector a central pillar of the new direction for the Kingdom (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). The Saudi Arabian higher education sector is seeking to improve the quality of Saudi universities so that at least five publicly funded universities are recognised among the top 200 universities in international university rankings by 2030 (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). Hence, a move toward strategic HRM practices aligns with and is critical for manifesting the vision. Notably, the Saudi higher education sector relies heavily on foreign-born (i.e. non-Saudi) academic staff, who occupy about 63% of the professorial positions (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Saudi public universities and public schools provide free education, books, and health services; additionally, the public universities and schools are open

to all citizens. The study of Islam still remains at the core of public universities and schools; however, the Saudi education system also provides a wide selection of courses and degrees in the sciences, humanities and professional studies (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). This diversity assists Saudi citizens to prepare for their current and future life and to work in a global economy (Ministry of Education , 2019).

Most Saudi universities enrol male and female students, but campuses are segregated on the basis of gender, as are most classrooms (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). The exceptions are the King Fahad University for Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) in Dahrhan, which is a male-only university, and Princess Nora bin Abdulrahman University (PNU) in Riyadh, which is female only. KFUPM focuses on advanced training and research in science, engineering and management directly related to the oil and mineral industries of the Kingdom. PNU is the world's largest female-only university and Saudi Arabia's first female university (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). PNU has a large campus and is built to accommodate 40,000 students and 12,000 staff. It also boasts a 700-bed teaching hospital and specialist research centres in information technology, nanotechnology and bioscience (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013).

2.7.3 Private higher education

There are 13 private universities in Saudi Arabia, all established in recent decades (Ministry of Education, 2019). **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.** provides details of the private universities. The Ministry of Education manages all private universities that recently contributed greatly to the sector by providing public funding (Ministry of Education, 2019). Government policy is promoting growth in the number of private university institutions that meet Saudi Arabia's national quality standards. The Saudi government considers that the emerging economy of the private sector requires a mixture of technological and practical skills to meet industry demands, which the present publicly funded universities cannot offer (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). The majority of private universities in Saudi Arabia provide Bachelor and Master degrees in various fields.

Table 2-4 List of private universities in Saudi Arabia (historical order)

No.	Institution Name	Established Year	Specialisation	Total Male Staff	Total Female Staff	Total Staff
1	University of Business and Technology	1996	Teaching and Research	187	90	277
2	Prince Sultan University	1999	Teaching and Research	191	145	336
3	Effat University	1999	Teaching and Research	30	122	152
4	Dar Al Hekma University	1999	Teaching and Research	20	230	250
5	Al Yamamah University	2001	Teaching and Research	100	49	149
6	Arab Open University	2002	Teaching and Research	86	48	134
7	Al Faisal University	2002	Teaching and Research	108	88	196
8	Fahad Bin Sultan University	2003	Teaching and Research	87	47	134
9	Riyadh Elm University	2004	Teaching and Research	143	184	327
10	Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University	2006	Teaching and Research	259	94	353
11	Dar Al Uloom University	2008	Teaching and Research	83	64	147
12	Al Maarefa University	2009	Teaching and Research	99	87	186
13	University of Prince Mugrin	2017	Teaching and Research	34	24	58

Source: The Ministry of Education (2019).

In the global higher education landscape, private institutions are increasing and represent the fastest-growing sector in higher education (Al-Dali, Fnais, & Newbould, 2013). In Saudi Arabia, the number of private universities is increasing rapidly; currently, they serve more than 35,000 students (Ministry of Education, 2019). Private universities worldwide face challenges in providing a world-class system and quality assurance. However, few countries have been able to limit and manage the expansion of the private sector (Al-Dali et al., 2013). In Saudi Arabia, private universities are a

mixture of high-quality institutions and some (usually for-profit universities) that make little contribution to the public good (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013).

The increased number of private universities in Saudi Arabia is a product of the thriving private sector with its education and job requirements, the growing population, and the changes in society and behavioural norms. These factors contribute to the development of a culture of private education in Saudi Arabia. In addition, generous scholarships are provided by the Saudi government for students to attend private universities (Al-Dali et al., 2013).

The population of Saudi Arabia increases steadily every year, leading to shifts in people's education ambitions and needs. There is also a growing willingness by both government and the population in general to increase higher education participation rates. Therefore, the number of higher education students has rapidly increased, reaching approximately 800,000 in 2011 (Al-Dali et al., 2013). By 2016, the number of students had increased to 1,680,913 students (Ministry of Education, 2019). **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.** shows that both genders have similar opportunities in the Saudi Arabian higher education system. Of the total higher education population, 48.1% are females and 51.9% males. The table also shows that most students are enrolled in Bachelor degrees (around 84.6%) while the remaining 15.4% are enrolled in Middle Diplomas, High Diplomas, Masters, Fellowships and PhDs.

Table 2-5 Students in Saudi Higher education in 2016

Qualification	Number Male Students	Rate of Male Students (%)	Number Female Students	Rate of Female Students (%)	Total Students	Rate of the Total (%)
Middle Diploma	159,203	78.25	44,246	21.7%	203,449	12.1%
Bachelor	682,770	48.04	738,471	52.0%	1,421,241	84.6%
High Diploma	5,346	49.21	5,516	50.8%	10,862	0.6%
Master	19,414	51.71	18,123	48.3%	37,537	2.2%
Fellowship	531	62.84	314	37.2%	845	0.1%
PhD	4,530	64.90	2,449	35.1%	6,979	0.4%
Total	871,794	51.86	809,119	48.1%	1,680,913	100.0%

Source: Ministry of Education (2019).

The key factors pushing the Saudi government to consider alternative sources of funding for higher education are the rapid increase in expenses and oil price instability. The main financing source for publicly funded universities in Saudi Arabia is the government, and the government budget is based primarily on oil prices (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013). Therefore, long-term planning has been ineffective because of fluctuating revenue for the general national budget and the budget for education in particular (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). Hence, promoting the private higher education sector has become attractive to the Saudi government.

Other non-financial factors have also played a large role in the growth of Saudi Arabia's private higher education sector. Growth in the private sector has created a new set of training needs and requires a more highly qualified workforce. Government and members of the private sector agree that the traditional publicly funded universities cannot fulfil the growing demands for higher education places (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). Possible contributing factors include overcrowding, scarcity of resources, and fear of reduced educational quality. Another reason for concern is the gap between the number of graduates from public universities and the number of available

government jobs (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013; Baqadir, Patrick, & Burns, 2011). Therefore, many graduates from public universities will be seeking jobs in the private sector; the aim of the Saudi Arabian government is to fill workforce vacancies with Saudi people rather than rely on foreign nationals.

In Saudi Arabia, there is a gap between what publicly funded universities produce and what the private sector needs. Public universities are more theoretically and research oriented and less focused on the needs of the nongovernment labour market. The graduates from the public universities are not sufficiently skilled for the Saudi future economy. In contrast, the private higher education sector offers its students a combination of technological and practical skills that helps the country to compete in the global economic market. Hence, the Saudi Arabian Government encourages the establishment and expansion of private universities (Bahrmos, 2001).

2.7.4 King Abdullah University for Science and Technology

King Abdullah University for Science and Technology (KAUST) is a public university, established in 2009. It is located in Thuwal, Saudi Arabia, and provides research and graduate training programs, with English as the main language of instruction (Ministry of Education, 2019). KAUST aims to build a world-class premier university that will attract talented international students and scholars, and to strongly contribute to developing a knowledge economy (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). KAUST has attracted high numbers of top scholars from around the world and provides them with a productive and rewarding research environment due to its huge financial resources, attractive work environment and employment inducements (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013).

Since its establishment, all the presidents of KAUST have been international recruits and are non-Saudi nationals, in order to improve the education and research quality. Until 2013, Professor Shih Choon Fong was the president; previously he was the president of the National University of Singapore (NUS). From 2013 to 2017, Professor Jean-Lou Chameau (former president of the US California Institute of Technology) was the president. Currently, Professor Tony F. Chan (former president of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) is the president (King Abdullah University of

Science and Technology, 2019). The university has its own Board of Trustees comprising international leaders in academia, science, finance, industry and public life (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013; King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, 2019).

Board members meet at least three times per year to oversee the activities of the university and to monitor its development and progress (King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, 2019). The board is responsible for appointing the president and approving the senior administrators and faculty members, based on the recommendations of the president. In addition, the board is responsible for the approval of rules governing university education, finance and administration. Further, it appoints and supports the managers of the day-to-day operations at the university (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013; King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, 2019).

The reputation of KAUST is improving yearly, although it was only established in 2009 (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2019). For instance, in 2015, it was ranked among the top 20 of the fastest-rising universities around the world for high-quality research output (natureINDEX, 2016). Moreover, in the Academic Ranking of World Universities – Shanghai (ARWU), KAUST’S rank increases yearly (Table 2-6). Ranked between 401 and 500 among universities worldwide in 2013–14, in 2018 it rose in rank to between 201 and 300 (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2019).

Table 2-6 International ranking of King Abdullah University for Science and Technology

No.	Ranking Name	Year	KAUST: EST. 2009
1	Academic Ranking of World Universities – Shanghai (ARWU)	2018	201–300
		2017	201–300
		2016	201–300
		2015	301–400
		2014	401–500
		2013	401–500

Created by the author. KAUST = King Abdullah University for Science and Technology; EST = established. Source: Academic Ranking of World Universities (2019).

2.7.5 The reputation of Saudi higher education

Global university rankings have become a major concern for higher education institutions (Brankovic, Ringel, & Werron, 2018). They have increased the focus on the agenda of those stakeholders who are either directly or indirectly associated with higher education, for instance, politicians, managers, administrators, policy makers, institutions, academia, and students (Stergiou & Tsikliras, 2014). Global university rankings develop their information based on several indicators: (1) a variety of quantitative criteria and measures that are given different weights, such as teaching quality, faculty quality, research and pre-capital performance, number of Nobel Prize winners among their staff, and student ratio; (2) web presence, visibility, and access; and (3) reputation, such as the World Reputation Rankings (Stergiou & Tsikliras, 2014). In these indicators, reputation is mostly assessed through scientific publications (Lukman, Krajnc, & Glavič, 2010).

The reputation of a higher education institution is described as the picture of value or quality, influence and trust that it has in the eyes of others (Stergiou & Tsikliras, 2014). Reputation is gained through various actions taken by the institution that create an image of offering particular internal and external competitive advantages (Baltaru, 2018; Fombrun, 1996). Higher education institutions have three main objectives: to produce high-quality research, to educate, and to support community services (Jöns & Hoyler, 2013).

According to the sustainability model, the three integrated phenomena of economic, environmental and social aspects should be considered together to maintain the organisation's sustainability (Lukman et al., 2010). However, the designers of ranking scales commonly evaluate the reputation of a university based on the reputation of its researchers and academics, followed by education indicators. Environmental issues are often ignored (Lukman et al., 2010). The ARWU and the Times Higher Education Ranking (THE) are the most influential of the world ranking tables (Table 2-7) (Hunt, Tierney, & Carruthers, 2006).

Table 2-7 International Ranking of Universities in Saudi Arabia

No.	Ranking	Year	KSU EST: 1957	KAU EST: 1967	KFUPM EST: 1963	KKU EST: 1999	UQU EST: 1981
1	QS Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings	2019	256	231	189	448	541-550
		2018	221	267	173	471-480	551-600
		2017	227	283	189	501-550	501-550
		2016	227	283	189	501- 550	501-550
		2015	237	303	199	551-600	551-600
		2014	249	334	225	601-650	551-600
		2013	253	360	216	601-650	551-600
		2012	197	334	208	501-550	501-550
		2011	200	NR	NR	NR	NR

No.	Ranking	Year	KSU EST: 1957	KAU EST: 1967	KFUPM EST: 1963	KKU EST: 1999	UQU EST: 1981
2	ARWU Academic Ranking of World Universities – Shanghai	2018	101-150	101-150	301-400	NR	NR
		2017	101-150	101-150	401-500	NR	NR
		2016	101- 150	101-150	301-400	NR	NR
		2015	151-200	151-200	401-500	NR	NR
		2014	151-200	151-200	401-500	NR	NR
		2013	151-200	201 -300	301-400	NR	NR
		2012	201-300	301-400	301-400	NR	NR
		2011	201-300	NR	301-400	NR	NR
3	THE Times Higher Education	2019	501-600	201-250	601-800	NR	NR
		2018	501-600	201-250	601-800	NR	NR
		2017	501-600	201-250	401-500	NR	NR
		2016	501-600	251-300	501-600	NR	NR
		2015	501-600	251-300	501-600	NR	NR

No.	Ranking	Year	KSU EST: 1957	KAU EST: 1967	KFUPM EST: 1963	KKU EST: 1999	UQU EST: 1981
		2014	351-400	351-400	NR	NR	NR
		2013	NR	301-350	NR	NR	NR
		2012	NR	301-350	NR	NR	NR
		2011	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR

Created by the author. EST: Established; KSU: King Saud University; KAU: King Abdulaziz University; KKU: King Khalid University; KFUPM: King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals; UQU: Umm Al-Qura University; NR: Not ranked. Source: Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings (QS) (2019); Academic Ranking of World Universities – Shanghai (ARWU) (2018); and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE) (2019).

Although the majority of Saudi publicly funded universities were established after 2000, several government universities have been listed among the top global universities (Table 2-7). Three Saudi government universities – King Saud University (KSU), King Abdulaziz University (KAU), and King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) – have appeared frequently in the three major university rankings: the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings (QS), the Academic Ranking of World Universities Shanghai (ARWU), and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE). In addition, two further universities King Khalid University (KKU) and Umm Al-Qura University (UQU) have appeared since 2012, but only in the QS. By analysing the QS and ARWU rankings, it is clear that Saudi universities are gaining higher positions each year, especially the three best-performing universities (KSU, KAU, and KFUPM). However, in the THE ranking, Saudi universities have not yet achieved high rankings, and the KAU is the first university to be listed. Compared with KSU and KFUPM, KAU is improving rapidly in this ranking.

All Saudi universities are now trying to realise the new Vision for 2030 (Ministry of Education , 2019). They are competing to achieve the goal of gaining a place among the top 200 universities around the world by 2030. This mission is challenging because most Saudi universities are relatively new, less than 15 years old (see Table 2-3). Nevertheless, achieving this mission is not impossible for Saudi higher education institutions if they invest in human capital (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

2.8 The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques’ Overseas Scholarship Program

2.8.1 History

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques’ Overseas Scholarship Program was established in 2005. The Saudi government has been funding students to study overseas since King Abdul Aziz established the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 (Bukhari & Denman, 2013). Initially, the Saudi government sent students to other Arab countries such as Egypt for Arab and Islamic

studies. In 1960, the King expanded the sponsorship program to give students study opportunities in the United State and Europe (Bukhari & Denman, 2013). By 1975, the Saudi Arabian Government had expanded the sponsorship program to include thousands of students who could study abroad to gain degrees in higher education (Taylor & Albasri, 2014).

Before 2005, the number of Saudi students in the United States was fewer than 5000. Since King Abdullah established the scholarship program, the number of Saudi students who study abroad has increased. In 2019, 85,508 Saudi students were studying a variety of degrees and subjects in different countries abroad (Ministry of Education, 2019). Female students form about 35% of this total. The majority of students are enrolled in business, medicine and medical services, and engineering and industrial engineering courses (Table 2-8). Most are studying Bachelor degrees, Masters degrees, PhDs and Languages (Figure 2-2).

Table 2-8 International course enrolments of Saudi students

Number	Course Name	Number of Students	Percentage
1	Business	17696	21
2	Medicine and Medical Services	17415	21
3	Engineering and Industrial Engineering	17283	20
4	Humanities	8806	10
5	Information Science	8801	7
6	Life Sciences	2859	3
7	Other courses	15648	18

Created by the author. Source: Ministry of Education (2019).



Figure 2-2 Degrees studied by Saudi students abroad

Saudi students are now studying in various countries across the world: the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland, France, Spain, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, New Zealand, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, the People’s Republic of China, Malaysia, India and South Africa (Ministry of Education, 2019) (Table 2-9). In addition, the Ministry of Education provides opportunities for Saudi students who cannot study abroad to earn degrees by sponsoring them at private universities in Saudi Arabia. However, the majority of the growth in Saudi student enrolment worldwide has occurred in three countries: the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia (Table 2-9). Saudi students prefer to study in these countries because they are English-speaking and English is now the international language (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2019). Of the countries that send their students for higher education in the United States, Saudi investment is the fourth highest (after China, India, and South Korea) (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2019).

Table 2-9 Number of students and countries of study for international Saudi students

Rank	Country	Number of Students
1	United States	45337
2	United Kingdom	14328
3	Australia	6682
4	Germany	1831
5	Ireland	1091
6	France	794
7	Netherlands	382
8	China	371
9	Austria	330
10	Japan	299
11	Other countries	14108

Created by the author. Source: Ministry of Education (2019).

2.8.2 Overview of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program comprises three stages of 5 years. The aim of the first two stages is to meet the study places and scientific disciplines at Saudi universities (The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program, 2019). The education sector, including higher education, has undergone important development and taken a qualitative leap since the program was launched in 2005 (The Custodian of the two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program, 2019). The mission of the Overseas Scholarship Program is “To prepare and qualify Saudi human resources in an effective manner so that they will be able to compete on an international level in the labour market and the different areas of scientific research, and thereby become an important source

of supply of highly qualified individuals for Saudi universities as well as the government and private sectors” (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2019, p. 11). Other objectives involve patriotic commitment, cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and intellectual development (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 2019).

In the first two stages, the students gained scholarships to obtain a degree from overseas in their choice of discipline. They were then required to return to Saudi Arabia and put personal effort into finding jobs (The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program, 2019). Amendments were made in the third development stage of the program because some graduates could not find their preferred job on return. In addition, local universities in Saudi Arabia now offer some disciplines for which the graduates had received scholarships.

The third stage of the program began in 2015. This stage implemented a new approach called Your Job First, Then Your Scholarship. This approach links jobs being sought with the scholarships given to the students, in order to meet the country’s needs (The Custodian of the two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program, 2019). In this stage, students are provided with jobs and then sent overseas to obtain the required degrees. First, the available jobs are announced and then candidates are invited to apply for the program. Government institutions are required to determine their needs in human resources, disciplines and academic levels. Overseas scholarships available under the program are identified via the job offerings, and students are guaranteed a job after qualifying.

2.8.3 The objectives of the program

The third stage of the Overseas Scholarship Program (Your Job First, Then Your Scholarship) targets both male and female students who have met the requirements and have graduated from local and international universities (The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program, 2019). This approach has increased benefits from the program in improving the economy and developing the country (The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program, 2019). Other objectives of the third

stage of the program are:

- Identify the actual career opportunities in different sectors of the country.
- Identify the specialities and field of study based on the country's needs.
- Fill the available vacancies with specialised and quality people.
- Distribute human resources properly based on the market's needs and direct these resources to rare and required disciplines.
- Keep pace with rapid changes in the development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and strengthen the Kingdom to compete at the level of developed nations.
- Achieve balanced development for the needs of specific geographical areas in terms of qualified human resources.
- Enhance the standards of quality and excellence in the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program.
- Link the candidate's skills and interests with his or her career field.
- Ensure maximum benefits from the program by expanding the admission, disciplines and academic level base.

2.8.4 Program steps: "Your Job First Then Your Scholarship"

The Ministry of Education (Higher Education) follows a sequence of steps in order to award a student a scholarship to obtain an international degree (The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program, 2019):

- Identifying the available jobs in different government sectors based on metrics that include the sector's value and importance, the number of opportunities available and the assessed need for the discipline.
- Signing a five-year cooperation agreement between the Ministry and beneficiaries (partners). Under this arrangement, the Ministry grants overseas scholarships to the annual number of candidates needed.
- Announcing the program and receiving the applications through the Ministry of Education. The ministry then makes initial nominations as per the terms of the program.
- Selecting of the required candidates by the beneficiaries, based on professional controls related to beneficiaries' areas of speciality and

activity. The list of final selected candidates are sent to the Ministry of Education.

- Checking that the beneficiaries have fulfilled the terms of the agreement by later employing the students who gained the overseas scholarships in their areas.
- Restricting the scholarships to the academic level for which the scholarship is needed.
- Committing the beneficiaries to recruit the students (after graduation) who received a scholarship to study the disciplines required by them.

2.9 The future for the scholarship program and Saudi higher education

The scholarship program has greatly improved the general level of education, particularly higher education, which ultimately enhances the country's economic growth (Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015). Saudi students study in the world's most highly recognised universities. Thus, the Saudi government has been investing in human capital to improve its education system. Educating Saudi students locally and internationally offers great potential to rapidly improve the level of higher education. During their study abroad, Saudi students encounter new languages, education systems and people from different backgrounds. All these experiences help Saudi students to live in new environments with new people who have different ways of thinking. When the graduates return home, Saudi universities gain a variety of qualified people from numerous international institutions. These internationally educated Saudis will improve both the level of Saudi education and the recognition and standing of Saudi universities globally (Hilal et al., 2015).

In addition, the scholarship program has political benefits through strengthening the relationship between the Saudi government and those of other countries. However, the host countries also enjoy benefits culturally, educationally and economically, which further strengthen political ties with Saudi Arabia. For instance, in the United States, the 45,337 students (Taylor & Albasri, 2014) and their families spend much money annually, which benefits many sectors of the US economy (e.g. housing, retail, recreation and

transportation). Also, all Saudi students who study under the scholarship program are fully insured, which benefits the American healthcare industry. During 2013–2014, for example, Saudi students contributed \$3.2 billion to the American economy (Taylor & Albasri, 2014).

Besides the economic benefits that lead to strengthening the political ties between the Saudi government and other countries, Saudi students bring cultural gifts and educational benefits to the universities and colleges of the countries in which they study (Hilal et al., 2015). International cultural sensitivity to the ways of others and global understanding between nations will increase with greater numbers of overseas students studying abroad (Hilal et al., 2015). Enhanced political ties between the Saudi government and the host countries' governments will result from the implementation of the Overseas Scholarship Program.

The scholarship program has affected the culture of Saudi Arabia. Saudi students and their families absorb and learn from the culture of their host country. During their stay, their children grow up in these countries; albeit temporarily, they become a part of that culture. Therefore, when Saudi students return home, they bring some of that culture with them, which will lead to significant future cultural changes. Saudi Arabia will become more open and accepting of other communities and cultures (Hilal et al., 2015), which will allow it to become more competitive in the global market (Hilal et al., 2015; Lawson, 2011). In addition, the scholarship graduates can become influential as world leaders because of the knowledge and experience gained from their studies abroad (Hilal et al., 2015; Lawson, 2011).

The Saudi Ministry of Education (Higher Education) has made great efforts to increase the country's human capital and improve the higher education system, which will increase economic growth (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). However, some remaining issues delay improvements to higher education. Some scholars (e.g. Fumasoli, Gornitzka, & Maassen, 2014) have argued that autonomy is a necessary requirement for universities in a competitive environment.

The bureaucratic nature of academic authority is obvious in higher education

sectors around the world and Saudi Arabia is no exception. (Jöns & Hoyler, 2013). The highly centralised nature of the Saudi education system gives publicly funded universities limited autonomy. Due to universities' important role in, and commitment to, research and the development of knowledge, most scholars argue that their activities should be self-supervised in order to ensure their continuous knowledge exchange and improvement (Ren & Li, 2013). However, institutional independence should comply with national and sub-national institutional structures and configurations to ensure both accountability and legitimate public interest (Brunetto, Shacklock, Teo, & Farr-Wharton, 2014). The present governance model in Saudi universities, in which the Ministry of Education directly controls all aspects of education and administration, may be no longer relevant in addressing the Kingdom's challenges (Al-Eisa & Smith, 2013). Therefore, Saudi universities may need increased autonomy in order to improve performance and help to improve the Saudi economy and the labour market.

Alamri (2011) noted that, despite the large number of expatriates, bureaucracy continues to be a major obstacle to higher education and that wages vary among Saudi and non-Saudi employees. Al-Eisa and Smith (2013) also considered that Saudi Arabian higher education is threatened by lack of a motivation system, inadequate incentive and reward systems, no incentives to encourage teaching and research activities, low levels of cooperation among Saudi universities and international universities, and ineffective appraisal systems for academic and administrative staff.

Most of the obstacles discussed above are related to HR departments; for instance, salary issues, motivation systems, lack of encouragement for teaching and research, inadequate reward and evaluation systems, and ineffective teamwork. Brown (2004) indicated that HRM directly affects public sector reforms, including those for publicly funded universities, and that HRM should assist organisations to implement strategies to achieve their goals (Wright & McMahan, 1992). To tackle the issues of Saudi universities, improved HRM practice is proposed to increase the efficiency of all staff, whether academic or non-teaching employees. Managers and HR professionals have a major role in organising people to perform their work

effectively. A good HRM team can help a university to create a competitive advantage and build a high reputation.

2.10 Saudi Vision 2030

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has established the Vision 2030. The vision reflects the ambition of the King of Saudi Arabia, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, to make the country a ground-breaking and effective global model of excellence in every respect (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). The vision is mainly presented by the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Prince Mohammad Bin Salman Al-Saud (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019) and is built on three main pillars. The first pillar is the country's status as the heart of the Arab and Islam worlds. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognises the importance of having the Two Holy Mosques in the country. The Two Holy Mosques are the direction of the Kaaba (Qibla) to which more than a billion Muslims turn at prayer. The second pillar is the determination to become a global investment powerhouse. Saudi Arabia has great investment capacity to boost the country's economy and diversify its income to create a sustainable economy. The third pillar is using the unique strategic location of the nation to become a global centre linking three continents – Asia, Europe and Africa. The location of Saudi Arabia between the main global waterways enables the country to become an epicentre of trade and the gateway to the world (Khan, 2016; Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

The 2030 Vision consists of three themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). The first theme is essential to achieving the vision and forms the basis for economic prosperity. Saudi people live following the Islamic principle of moderation, enjoy a healthy life in a lovely setting, have been shielded by caring families, are proud of their national identities and ancient cultural heritage, and are backed by empowering social and healthcare systems (Khan, 2016; Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

The second theme, a thriving economy, offers possibilities for everyone

through the building of an educational scheme that meets the market requirements and provides financial opportunities for entrepreneurs and small and large companies. Therefore, the Saudi government seeks to develop its investment tools to open more economic sectors, increase diversity in the economy and establish job opportunities. The Saudi government will also expand its economy by privatising some public services, enhancing its company climate, obtaining exceptional global talent and investment, and taking advantage of its unique strategic position across the three continents (Khan, 2016; Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). In this theme, the Saudi government aims to close the gap between job markets and the outputs of higher education. Also, the government seeks to have at least five Saudi universities among the top 200 universities in the international rankings by 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2019).

In the third theme (an ambitious nation), the Saudi government will use efficiency and accountability at all levels to ensure an efficient, transparent, accountable and high-performance government. The Saudi government will also create the best environment in which to take responsibility for and provide initiatives to confront the challenges and opportunities for its citizens and the private and non-profit sectors. (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

The Saudi government underlined in each of these themes obligations and objectives that reflect its ambition and represent what it aims to achieve. For the first theme (a vibrant society), the main commitments are:

- To increase the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's capacity to welcome Umrah visitors (Muslim people who visit the Two Holy Mosques) from 8 million to 30 million yearly.
- To more than double the number of UNESCO-registered Saudi heritage sites.
- To have three Saudi cities ranked among the world's 100 top cities.
- To boost domestic spending on cultural and entertainment events in the Kingdom from 2.9% to 6%.
- To increase the proportion of people who exercise at least once a week from 13% to 40% of the population.

- To increase Saudi rank from 26 to 10 on the Social Capital Index (SCI).
- To increase the average life span from 74 to 80 years (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

For the second theme (a thriving economy), the main commitments are:

- To reduce the unemployment rate from 11.6% to 7%.
- To increase the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises to the GDP (Gross domestic Product) from 20% to 35%.
- To improve the representation of women in the workforce from 22% to 30%.
- To move Saudi Arabia from the world's 19th-largest economy into the top 15.
- To improve the localisation of the oil and gas sector from 40% to 75%.
- To raise the assets of the public investment fund from 600 billion Saudi Arabian Riyal (SAR) to over 7 trillion SAR.
- To increase the country's position in the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) from 25 to within the top 10 countries.
- To increase direct foreign investment from 3.8% to the global level of 5.7% of GDP.
- To raise the contribution of the private sector from 40% to 65% of GDP.
- To improve the country's global ranking in the logistics performance index from 49 to 25 and ensure that the Kingdom is a regional leader.
- To increase the share of non-oil exports in GDP from 16% to 50% (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

For the third theme (an ambitious nation), the main commitments are:

- To raise non-oil government revenue from SAR163 billion to SAR1 trillion.
- To increase the Saudi Arabian ranking from 80 to 20 in the Index for Government Effectiveness.
- To increase the country ranking from 36 to within the top five countries in the E-Government Survey Index ranking.
- To raise household savings from 6% to 10% of household total revenue.

- To raise the contribution of the non-profit sector to the GDP from less than 1% to 5%.
- To have one million volunteers a year (compared with 11,000 now) (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019).

2.1 | The human resource department in Saudi higher education

Saudi publicly funded universities have realised the importance of human resource departments as key elements to assist them to achieve their mission, vision and goals. A reading and analysis of Saudi university websites shows the majority of HR departments are called either the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs or Deanship of Human Resource. The head of the deanship is one of the principal administrative officers of a university and is an academic staff member. The main responsibilities of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs were observed to be:

1. Plan and coordinate the yearly recruitment of faculty members locally and internationally.
2. Make and send to the Rector for consideration or approval recommendations concerning wage increases, promotions, workers' needs, termination of employment, and any issues that emerge during the year.
3. Manage all issues concerning the faculty's conditions of employment, including salaries, allowances, health and medical benefits, and education-eligible dependants.
4. Supervise and make recommendations on the process for faculty promotions, sabbatical leave, release time and leave absence, grievances, and scholarships, both inside and outside the Kingdom.
5. Direct university employees in obtaining all official documentation such as visas and work permits (King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals, 2019).

The Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs (Deanship of Human Resource) is responsible of organising the financial and administrative affairs for the staff of publicly funded Saudi universities staff, including faculty members, administrative employees, technicians and workers (Saudi Electronic University, 2020). Also, the Deanship undertakes and supervises measures that assist and organise Saudi universities to achieve a high performance in teaching, research and community service through administration of human resources (Majmah University, 2020). The Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs is especially important in Saudi university administrations as it provides support and encouragement to assist universities to perform their duties and carry out their responsibilities.

The main goals of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs were observed to be:

1. Creating a modern institutional administrative system for the Deanship.
2. Developing the professional and administrative capabilities of the Deanship and university staff.
3. Encouraging social communication for Deanship staff and University staff and improving their participation in community programs through effective partnerships.
4. Providing an attractive and sustainable work environment for the Deanship employees and University staff.
5. Creating a fair and healthy work environment to ensure that standard practices and regulations are applied and upheld, and efforts are made to observe objectivity and transparency (Jouf University, 2020; Majmah University, 2020).

2.12 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the Saudi Arabian context. The chapter explained the geographical location of Saudi Arabia, followed by a discussion of the demographics, the government structure and the economy of Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, the culture, traditions and religion of Saudi Arabia were discussed. Next, the background of Saudi Arabian higher education, including the government higher education and private higher education systems, was explained. This chapter also discussed the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program and the future of the scholarship program and higher education in Saudi Arabia. Further, the chapter discussed the Saudi Vision 2030. Finally, the chapter provided an overview of human resource departments in Saudi higher education.

The next three chapters will present the three essays (objectives) of the study, Essay 1, Essay 2, and Essay 3, comprising chapters 3, 4 and 5. Chapter 3 discusses the first objective of the study, which was to explore tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions. This essay, titled “The Devolvement of HR practices in Saudi Arabian universities: Exploring tensions and challenges”, has been submitted as a paper to the journal *Public Personnel Management* (Impact Factor: 0.789) and is currently under review.

Chapter 4 discusses the second objective of the study, which was to explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how (HRD) opportunities are administered. This essay, titled “One glass, different shapes: Human resource development practices in Saudi Arabia’s higher education sector” has been submitted as a paper to the journal *Personnel Review* (Impact Factor: 1.362) and is currently under review.

Chapter 5 discusses the third objective of the study, which was to examine the link between HRM practices and university performance. This essay, titled “HRM practices and academic research output: Evidence from the Saudi higher education sector”, has been submitted as a paper to the *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance* (Impact Factor: 1.79) and is currently under review.

The next chapter (Chapter 3) discusses the first objective of the study (Essay 1).

Objective 1: To explore tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions.

Submission journal: *Public Personnel Management*.

Title of paper: The devolvement of HR practices in Saudi Arabian universities: Exploring tensions and challenges.

CHAPTER 3. Essay 1. The Devolvement of Human Resource Practices in Saudi Arabian Universities: Exploring tensions and challenges

3.1 Chapter outline

This chapter comprises seven major sections which are described below. Section 3.2 provides an introduction to this study and identifies the primary research question. A literature review on strategic human resource management in higher education institutions, the notion of HR devolvement and strategic HRM advancement, and an overview of Saudi Arabia is provided in Section 3.3. Section 3.4 outlines the research methodology of the study, including an examination of the different research paradigms, selection of the research paradigm and methodology, methodology and research design, data collection procedure and instrument, time horizons and data analysis. The findings are explained in Section 3.5. Section 3.6 discusses the findings and their implications for strategic human resource management alignment. Section 3.7 notes the study limitations and summarises the study.

3.2 Introduction

Strategic HRM has become widespread within the resource-based literature with its focus on HRM alignment with organisational strategy (Boon et al., 2019). HRM alignment supports a value-driven and integrative approach to HRM, a shift from traditional HRM, which is administrative, prescriptive and reactive in nature (Jiuhua, Cooper, Cieri, Thomson, & Zhao, 2008). Fundamentally, both the empirical and theoretical literature has widely adopted strategic HRM as a progressive approach to human capital development and utilisation in support of organisational competitiveness (Budhwar, 2000; Jiuhua et al., 2008; Reichel & Lazarova, 2013). The strategic HRM notion thus emphasises a set of functions concerning HRM integration and devolvement in order to achieve HRM alignment (Budhwar, 2000).

According to Jiuhua et al. (2008, p. 841), “strategic HRM has two important dimensions, i.e. vertically it links HR practices with the strategic management process of the firm and horizontally it allows HR practices to be integrated and supportive of each other”. Importantly, a critical examination of current strategic HRM literature reveals it is dominated by applied research within contexts of developed or advanced economies. To implement these theories and conceptualisations in a developing country context will require that these processes leapfrog into developed HRM practices and processes. Advancing strategic HRM in Saudi Arabia will bring with it inadvertent tensions and implementation challenges such as staff training and development, building managerial capabilities, and redesigning HRM functions. Prior to implementation, the current HRM contextual practices must be examined and understood.

Essentially, a move toward strategic HRM alignment, is critical to align with the higher education development focus of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030. Several researchers support the need for more research in the Middle East region. Saudi Arabia is of strategic and political importance within the international business environment, with high investment by multinational

businesses. Hence, understanding how HRM practices and processes are operationalised through the lens of HR devolvement is vital.

This chapter describes several tensions and challenges which potentially hinder progress toward achieving a strategic HRM focus and delay strategic HRM implementation and people development in Saudi Arabia. The chapter supports the alignment of HRM processes and practices within Saudi Arabia's higher education institutions to advance national skill levels for the future demands of a growing economy. The Saudi Arabian government has been seeking to close the gap between higher education output and industry needs as part of its Vision 2030, which is built on three fundamental pillars: a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). Given the government's vision for higher education, there is now greater acceptance and recognition that strategic HRM alignment can support the goals of higher education institutions in the current competitive global education market (Hailey et al., 2005; Truss, 2008). Therefore, the current devolvement of HRM processes and practices within higher education institutions raises the question *What tensions and challenges are associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions?*

3.3 Literature review

3.3.1 Strategic human resource management in higher education institutions

The capability of Saudi Arabia to build a robust human capital is underpinned by the alignment of HRM with its envisaged human resource development (HRD) strategy to uplift national skills for the future demands of a growing economy. This alignment calls for the advancement of strategic HRM in higher education institutions. The notion of HRM decentralisation to operational managers underpins the drive to position the HR department as a strategic business partner (Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2011). Hailey et al. (2005) attest that the increasing struggle for recognition within the organisational structure and decision-making processes have raised concerns

about the status and recognition of HRM in organisations, particularly in less developed and emerging economies.

The advancement of strategic HRM in both private and public-sector organisations has been driven by industrial changes, economic development (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015) and the need to be more responsive to employee needs (Bell, 2017). The existence and sustainability of HRM departments is assured when they function within organisations to add value and effectively streamline employment relationships across the entire organisation (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). The HR department has grown in significance due to the acknowledgement of human capital as a strategic resource for organisational survival and competitiveness (Amalou-Döpke & Süß, 2014). The HR department in most organisations has undergone a major rejuvenation, transitioning from performing an administrative HRM role to becoming a strategic business partner by providing core business functions that contribute to organisational competitiveness and growth (Amalou-Döpke & Süß, 2014).

According to Ulrich and Dulebohn (2015), the evolution of the HRM function can be categorised into administrative, HRM practice and HRM strategy waves. In the administrative wave, HRM was viewed as a line management function with the objective of increasing administrative efficiency and with limited links to the strategy of the organisation (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). The HRM practice wave was driven by innovative policies and practices, work processes and organisation design. The HRM practice wave requires highly skilled HRM professionals with the ability to tailor practices to organisational needs. The HRM strategy wave progresses to creating an alignment between HRM policies and practices and the business strategy (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). Thus contemporary HRM functions have extended beyond administrative activities to developing innovative HRM practices that align to and support business strategy.

The strategic HRM literature indicates that HRM processes and practices in higher education institutions cannot be additive; rather, they should be interdependent. The HRM department and the various faculties must complement each other in the management and organisation of HRM, which corresponds with the concept of the devolvement of HRM functions

(Budhwar, 2000; Jiuhua et al., 2008; Reichel & Lazarova, 2013). The primary role of HRM in higher education is to contribute to the overall competitiveness of the institution in the areas of research, teaching and community engagement.

In the management and organisation of HRM processes and practices in higher education institutions, various HRM actors are involved (Gilbert et al., 2011). Although HRM processes and practices reflect organisational actions, faculties are generally mandated with the organisation of operational HRM practices, including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance evaluation and employee promotions. Within the context of higher education institutions, substantial organisation of HRM processes and practices is often assumed by the faculty leaders (e.g. deans and heads of schools). It is therefore unclear what HRM functions (roles) are left for the HR department. Gilbert et al. (2011) asserted that the HR departments within higher education institutions are gradually losing their core functionality, which has been absorbed by faculties. Arguably, transferring HRM functions to faculties may create new opportunities to influence and improve the management and organisation of HRM processes and practices in higher education institutions (Mellahi & Wood, 2013; Stone, 2017). However, a divergent view is that it may create challenges because faculties may not have staff with HRM knowledge and capabilities (Mellahi & Wood, 2013). Despite the devolution of HRM functions in higher education institutions, Gilbert et al. (2011) argue that the HR unit still has a fundamental responsibility for employee wellbeing and safeguarding against management indifference.

3.3.2 The notion of HR devolvement and strategic HRM advancement

It is widely accepted that the centrality of HRM has shifted focus on several trajectories since its inception. For example, HRM has shifted from the domain of personnel management, which remained administrative and reactive in nature and arose from the need to enforce statutory compliance for much of the 20th century (Budhwar, 2000; Jiuhua et al., 2008). While implementing administrative functions, personnel management primarily concerned itself with employee record keeping and adherence to policy and

statutory guidelines (Jiuhua et al., 2008). The latter decades of the 20th century witnessed the winds of change in personnel management with the emergence of behavioural perspectives (e.g. human relations theory and hierarchy of needs theory) on employee motivation (non-monetary factors) in order to increase employee productivity (Nankervis, Baird, Coffey, & Shields, 2016; Stone, 2017). These behavioural perspectives coupled with government interventions helped guarantee workers' rights through the enactment of new legislation, which led to a more dynamic HRM approach (Budhwar, 2000; Nankervis et al., 2016). Interestingly, the spread of free-market competition and technology-based organisations (evidence of the knowledge-based economy) turned HRM in a new direction – strategic HRM. Strategic HRM is underpinned by HRM alignment through a value-driven and integrative approach to HRM (Jiuhua et al., 2008; Reichel & Lazarova, 2013).

Budhwar (2000, pp. 285-286) argued that “one of the central features of the changing debate of HRM was the importance given to the integration of HRM into the business and corporate strategy and the devolvement of HRM to line managers instead of personnel specialists” . The devolvement of HRM practices and processes represents an extension of responsibilities to include line managers and supervisors in the implementation of HRM functions (Budhwar, 2000; Jiuhua et al., 2008; Stone, 2017). The strategic HRM literature typically categorises HR devolvement into two types, internal and external. External devolvement occurs through outsourcing HR while internal devolvement occurs through HR role delegation (Jiuhua et al., 2008; J. Paauwe, 1995). Prior literature argues that the increasing interest in HR devolvement has been occasioned by free-market competition, globalisation, technology advances, and the need for organisations to be more operationally efficient and effective (Jiuhua et al., 2008; Reichel & Lazarova, 2013).

For example, increasing market competition in recent times implies that HR devolvement is becoming significant in linking HRM with organisational strategy, which corresponds with the proliferation of decentralisation and flatter organisational structures (Paauwe & Boon, 2018). Decentralisation in HRM within organisations provides greater levels of efficiency in the

management and utilisation of human capabilities (Järvalt & Randma-Liiv, 2010; López-Cotarelo, 2018). Prior literature supports HR devolvement on the basis that it reduces the cost of operations, offers opportunities for better control systems, and supports HRM proactivity and empowerment of front-line managers for succession planning (Budhwar, 2000; Jiuhua et al., 2008). Overall, HR devolvement provides a strong basis for the advancement of strategic HRM thinking and practice. It has resulted in the widening of line managers' responsibilities to include HRM activities in the face of HRM alignment with corporate strategy. This reflects Budhwar's proposition "that as HRM becomes more and more strategic, personnel specialists will have less time for the traditional routine type of HR activities. These activities will then be devolved to, and performed by, the line managers" (Budhwar (2000, p.286). It is therefore anticipated that within higher education institutions, more HRM functions and responsibilities will be devolved to faculties than to other organisations, which is likely to create tensions and challenges.

3.3.3 Overview of Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Islamic country, with a strong traditional Islamic monarchy, built on a tribal system with a large royal family orientation and influence (Al-bakr, Bruce, Davidson, Schlaffer, & Kropiunigg, 2017). HRM practices have been significantly influenced by Islamic laws, beliefs, principles and value system. Mellahi and Budhwar (2010) state that managers generally draw from Quranic principles in conducting business activities in the Middle Eastern region because of the embeddedness of Islamic religion in societal values and belief systems.

Saudi cultural values are different from those found in the Western world (Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan, & Rajasekar, 2017; Yavas & Yasin, 1999). For example, in Saudi Arabia the social status of employees and their families is determined by the kind of job they do and their sector of employment. Thus, in general, Saudi staff prefer to work in the public sector instead of the private sector. The preference for non-Saudi staff, particularly in the private sector, is because foreign workers are easier to manage and discipline than Saudi staff (Mellahi & Budhwar, 2010). Finally, local workers encounter more difficulties in integrating in a multicultural work environment than foreign

nationals (Mellahi & Budhwar, 2010).

Typically, Saudi public universities recognise that the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs (similar to HR services in universities in Western cultures) is the main unit responsible for managing human resources and employee wellbeing. Notwithstanding the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs' primary responsibility for HRM services, other units and departments perform complementary HRM tasks. These include Heads of Colleges and Deans; the Scientific Council; Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research; and the Academic Development and Quality Deanship (Deanship of Skills Development). The Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs predominantly performs the administrative aspects of HRM functions. While the heads of colleges and schools have some level of control in administering HRM activities, the Scientific Council and the Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research have significant influence and control in administering HRM services, with the exception of staff training, development and performance evaluation. Although the abovementioned units perform complementary roles in HRM services, an ad hoc committee is established annually to recruit foreign academic staff. The complexity and duplication in administering HRM functions in Saudi higher education institutions undermines the effectiveness of HRM practices and processes.

3.4 Research methodology

This section starts with an overview of the research methods and design processes. It explains the role and contribution of research philosophy to the understanding and the advancement of knowledge and outlines the research approach and strategy employed. Further, the section elucidates the time perspective and data collection methods along with methodological issues such as validity and reliability, ethical considerations and access to sources for collecting and analysing data.

3.4.1 Research paradigms

A research paradigm is a type of methodological and philosophical option for

an inquiry (Ramlo, 2016). The research paradigm is the framework for scientific practice according to the researcher's beliefs, practices, assumptions and philosophies about the world (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). That is, a research paradigm provides a conceptual framework that assists in deciding how the research is designed; how data is gathered and explained; and how the findings are taken. In business and management studies, there are five major paradigms: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism (Saunders, 2011).

Positivism is a philosophical theory illustrating that certain knowledge is based on natural phenomena, properties and relations. In other words, the positivist focuses on a strictly scientific empirical method designed to produce pure data and facts that cannot be influenced by human interpretation or bias. As positivists, researchers try to remain neutral and separated from their research and data in order to prevent any impact on the results and findings (Saunders, 2011). Also, positivist researchers can use existing theory to develop their hypotheses. Such hypotheses are tested and are either confirmed in whole or part or debunked, culminating in more studies of theory that can be further investigated. However, a positivist need not start with an existing theory. All natural sciences have evolved as a result of commitment to the environment and researchers have gathered their data before they formulate and test their hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Ideally, positivist researchers support a quantitative research method that logically develops and tests hypotheses for a particular research project (Bryman, 2017).

Critical realism is a philosophical theory that explains what we see and experience in terms of the fundamental mechanisms of nature that are observable events (Bhaskar, 2016). For critical realists, the most significant philosophical consideration is reality. Also, they often regard reality as external and independent, but not directly accessible through our experience and understanding of it. There are two steps in critical realism for understanding the world (Saunders, 2011): first, the sensations and events that we experience; second, the mental processing that goes on sometime after the experience. Critical realist research focuses on providing information about

observable organisational events through the researcher's deep understanding of the reasons for, and mechanisms through which, social structures underpin everyday organisational life. Therefore, a detailed overview of social and institutional systems and how they have changed over time are the most common research method for critical realists (Bhaskar, 2016). Researchers from critical realism claim that critical realistic concepts of causality are not limited to statistical correlations and quantitative methods and are suitable for a variety of methods.

Interpretivism is a research philosophy illustrating that humans are able to create meanings and are different from physical phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Interpretivism claims that the study of the connections between human and social worlds differs from the study of physical phenomena. Therefore, it is necessary to differentiate between social sciences research and natural sciences research. Also, interpretivism argues that there is no one universal "law" that can be applied to everybody (Saunders, 2011). Interpretivist researchers believe that people create and experience different realities because people have different cultural backgrounds, circumstances and times, which all lead to their finding different meanings in their experiences of the world about them. Therefore, researchers aim to build new, deeper insights and understandings of social worlds and contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Broadly, interpretivists confirm the significance of history, culture and language in forming our experiences and understanding of organisational and social worlds. Interpretivism is subjectivist because it concentrates on complexity, richness, interpretations and making meaning. Interpretivists consider that the research process can be influenced by factors such as the interpretation of research data and materials, and their own values and beliefs.

Postmodernism affirms the role of power relations and language, tries to question acceptable methods of thinking and gives voice to other marginalised views (Saunders, 2011). Postmodernists are similar to interpretivists in their critique of positivism and objectivism, and attribute importance to the role of language. Also, postmodernist scholars often try to detect and question the relations of power that sustain dominant realities

(Saunders, 2011). Postmodernist investigators welcome the deconstruction of any sort of data, conversations, texts, images, numbers and voices. Also, they use in-depth investigations of phenomena. Furthermore, postmodernist philosophy recognises that the power relations between the researcher and projects shape the knowledge created as a part of the research process.

Pragmatism is a philosophy of research that holds that concepts are only important when supporting action (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Pragmatism seeks to consider accurate and rigorous knowledge, values and facts, subjectivism and objectivism, and different contextualised experiences. Additionally, pragmatist researchers consider concepts, theories, hypotheses, ideas, and research results in terms of the roles they play as instruments of thought and action, and in terms of practical consequences in a particular context (Saunders, 2011). For pragmatist investigators, research begins with a problem and aims to provide practical solutions that suggest future research. In general, pragmatists believe that there are many methods of interpreting the world and research action, that there is no one point that is able to give a complete picture, and that there may be multiple realities (Biddle & Schafft, 2015). Pragmatism utilises a suitable method (or methods) that allows reliable, well-founded, credible and relevant data to be gathered to improve the research.

3.4.2 Selection of research paradigm and methodology

Based on an assessment of the five research philosophies, this study employed interpretivist philosophy due to the complexity and uniqueness of HRM research and the research objective to be addressed. The choice of an exploratory qualitative research approach was driven by the need to draw from a data set that supports rigorous analyses and values open-ended discovery of participants' lived experiences (Anderson, 2017) of issues around the devolvement of HR processes and practices in an under-researched context. This approach supports research contextualisation (Levitt et al., 2018). Administering HRM functions in Saudi public universities is complex due to the multiple roles performed by various HRM departments, heads of colleges and the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs. Interdependence with the Ministry of Higher Education for HR policy direction adds another

layer of complexity.

The relevance of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs has been called into question because its role has been narrowed to advertising job vacancies and issuing employment letters. This study used an exploratory qualitative approach to ascertain and understand how shared HRM functions (HR devolvement) in Saudi higher education institutions affect the relationship between the HRM department (managers) and faculties (deans of colleges) and undermine the implementation of strategic HRM progression and people development. An exploratory qualitative study was appropriate due to the dearth of management and HRM research in the Arabian Gulf Regions (Moideenkutty et al., 2011).

The interpretivist philosophy was chosen after carefully evaluating the ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology suggested by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004). These authors show that ontologically truth is what is extracted from the investigation. In other words, the essence of reality is not universally true but rather is based on practical consequences of ideas. The information gained from this study is epistemologically relevant in the context of the research. Also, the results are true because the data are obtained from the participants in the study context. Methodologically, this study used a qualitative research design, which is consistent with interpretivism. Finally, axiologically this study started with a problem and has provided practical solutions that will generate future practice, which again is consistent with interpretivism. In the current study, the research is external to the study process as all participants received enough research information to gain their consent to participate. Hence, after the five paradigms were carefully examined, interpretivism was recognised as the best research paradigm to fulfil the study's purpose.

The adoption of interpretivism for the study led to the choice of an inductive research approach. The research approach is crucial for several reasons: it assists the researcher to make informed decisions about the research method to be used, to consider appropriate research strategies and choices applicable to the study, and to use suitable research designs to address certain limitations (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012). In emerging economics contexts,

several authors have indicated the importance of the interpretivist paradigm in understanding complex phenomena such as HRM systems in organisations that are complex and not well understood (Dixon, Meyer, & Day, 2010; Fengqiao & Lin, 2010).

Case study research suits the inductive approach well, especially in areas that have limited theoretical and empirical literature (McLaren, 2010). Due to the Saudi Arabian context, which has both complexity and lack of prior study, this study employed an inductive and qualitative research approach, which led to the choice of a case study design.

3.4.3 Methodology and research design

3.4.3.1 Case study design

A case study design is described as one of the research strategies that enables an in-depth exploration of a specific research problem through either a single or multiple cases (Yin, 2017). The objective of this study was to explore the tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions. Therefore, the adoption of a case study strategy was most appropriate for this study (Chang, Mellahi, & Wilkinson, 2009) and was used for three reasons. First, the study aimed to explore in detail the tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions; the case study design was the most suitable strategy for gathering in-depth and specific information for answering the research objective (Aguzzoli & Geary, 2014). Second, a case study design has advantages, including data triangulation (Lyon, Møllering, & Saunders, 2015). Therefore, the researcher used in-depth interviews as the main tool for data collection and used document analysis to support the data. Third, due to the scarcity of relevant literature in the context of Saudi Arabia, a case study design enabled the researcher to undertake an in-depth investigation to fulfil the research objective.

3.4.3.2 Selection of participants and case studies

The study focused on academic staff, Heads of Colleges and the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs (also known as HR managers) from six

publicly funded universities in Saudi Arabia. These universities were purposively selected by applying two criteria. First, as discussed in Chapter 2, there are three phases to the growth in Saudi higher education, namely, the foundation, expansion and comprehensive phases. Therefore, the data sample for this study included one university from the foundation phase, two universities from the expansion phase and three universities from the comprehensive phase. The second criterion was willingness to participate in the study (Mansour, Holmes, Butler, & Ananthram, 2019). The variety in university types selected for the study provided the comprehensiveness of the investigation into the challenges of the devolvement of HR practices and processes within the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. It also provided the lens for understanding the tensions in the implementation of HRM functions and the degree of similarity or differences across the sample case studies in relation to the devolvement of HR practices.

Regarding the selection of participants, many of the participants had served in different roles such as HR managers, deans of colleges and heads of disciplines (Table 3-1). Snowball sampling was used to select the participants for the study. Snowball sampling means that research participants already selected recruit other participants for a test or study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). These categories of participants were selected due to their capacity to inform the study, and for their various experiences in administering HRM functions in the Saudi university context.

Table 3-1 Study sites and participants interviewed

University	Number of interviews	Key participants		
		HR managers	Deans & Heads of School	Lecturers
University A	5	1	2	2
University B	6	1	3	2
University C	5	1	2	2
University D	4	1	1	2
University E	4	1	1	2
University F	4	1	1	2
Total	28	6	10	12

3.4.3.3 Documents

Documentary evidence has become important as a data source in qualitative case study research in HRM and in social science research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, documentary records included data collected from sources such as HRM research publications, the universities' websites and annual reports.

3.4.4 Data collection procedure and instrument

Access to the study data was accomplished incrementally. The first step was to get to know and fully comprehend the characteristics of the universities involved. The second step was to send a formal letter to the universities explaining the aim and objective of the study in order to gain access. The letter also addressed organisational concerns about maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the universities. Finally, the researcher sent follow-up reminders via emails and telephone calls about conducting the study to ensure full access.

The research drew from multiple data sources in six publicly funded universities. These data sources included documentary records and in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, and the

interview guide provided a broad scope and much flexibility to discuss in detail several HRM issues within Saudi public universities. The issues included how sharing HRM functions between different units and departments affected the relationship between HR department managers and faculty deans, and the tensions around the devolvement of HRM processes and practices.

The interviews were conducted in both English and Arabic because the official language in Saudi higher education institutions is Arabic, but a few universities and departments offer programs with English as the mode of delivery. In some interviews, foreign nationals preferred to use English since Arabic was not their first language. Overall, twenty face-to-face interviews were conducted in Arabic and eight in English. The interviews conducted in Arabic were transcribed and then translated into English. A third reviewer then independently reviewed the translation process to ensure reliability (Brislin, 1980). Also, to ensure communicative validity during the interview, the researcher established what Sandberg (2005) refers to as a “community of interpretation” by explaining the purpose of the study to all participants before their interview. The interviews lasted between 65 and 70 minutes. The twenty-eight face-to-face interviews were audio recorded.

The research protocol received ethics clearance from the researcher’s university. The findings from the interviews were supported by and triangulated with documentary records as well as local literature sources. The documents were sourced from HRM research publications, the universities’ websites and annual reports. The secondary data assisted in obtaining sufficient information and data about the selected universities. For instance, the universities’ websites and annual reports provided information regarding the establishment date and location of the selected universities. They also provided information about the role of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs as well as the role of other Deanships or units within the selected universities. HRM research publications provided information about the governance regulatory requirements of the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. Also, they explain the linkage between Saudi Arabian higher education sectors and other ministries such as the Ministry of Finance, the

Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Civil Services. The findings from the interviews were supported by and triangulated with documents and local literature sources. Drawing from multiple data sources enabled the extraction of information from diverse organisations and groups to explore the challenges that undermine the effective management and organisation of HRM processes and practices in the Saudi higher education sector. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality of respondents, the universities were given pseudonyms.

3.4.5 Time horizons

A time frame for conducting research is essential because it affects the reliability and integrity of the research findings. Studies may be cross-sectional or longitudinal depending on the research objectives and the amount of time available for the researcher to conduct the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In academic research, cross-sectional studies are often used due to time and cost constraints. Therefore, this study used a cross-sectional approach to explore tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions.

3.4.6 Data analysis

The validity and reliability of the data were carefully ensured in this study. The reliability of a study depends on the extent to which the information collection methods and analytical techniques used can generate consistent results; validity focuses on the appropriateness of the research design and technique used in the study (Noble & Smith, 2015). The researcher employed multiple data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis for triangulation to ensure both reliability and validity of the findings. Also, for verification and feedback, the transcripts of ten of the interviews were emailed to the respective interviewees for them to comment on. This respondent validation increases the credibility of the study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017).

Nvivo™ software is considered standard for the management of qualitative data (Roman, Osinski, & Erdmann, 2017). The data was coded using Nvivo™ to manage and sort the data and then analysed using a thematic data analysis

technique guided by the prior literature. In this study, the interview transcripts were uploaded into Nvivo version 12™. Thematic analysis is the most common technique in qualitative data analysis. This approach includes undertaking a search for themes in interview transcripts and field notes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Noting the frequency of appearance of certain words or phrases helped the researcher to identify themes. In this study, the researcher examined various codes that indicated key patterns, and these patterns or themes were available for further extensive qualitative interpretation. The identified themes created the basis for organising, presenting and interpreting the rest of the data in the study. Thematic analysis provided flexibility in analysing qualitative data; for example, minor themes sometimes became broader themes with additional analysis. Also, themes were grouped together for proper description and explanation. In this approach, the first step was to identify the themes that emerged in the conducted interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The second step was to observe whether a theme was unique to a single interview or if it appeared in several interviews. Then, similar ideas were grouped into main themes. The use of this procedure could lead to giving prominence to some themes over others (Bryman, 2001).

There were orders of analysis (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). First, descriptive codes that reflected the themes raised by the interviewees were created. Second, these initial descriptive codes were grouped into integrated conceptual themes that identified potential relationships and hierarchies, as shown in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1 Node tree

Examples of supporting quotes	First-order codes	Second-order codes
<p>The fact that there is duplication in managing human resources practices at the university. There is an independent deanship called the Deanship of Faculty and Staff Affairs, but this Deanship does not freely practice all human resources practices because there are other deanships that supervise some of the human resources practices (participant #4).</p>	<p>Duplication in managing human resources practices</p>	<p>Duplication and role ambiguity of HRM functions</p>
<p>The basic impediment is the length of the procedures: sometimes we want to recruit faculty members, but the long procedures might allow that applicant to contract with other organisations. The issue is also more complicated when any department of the university has to attract faculty members from outside the Kingdom because there is a great competition among the universities around the world to attract the competent and experienced faculty members (participant #11).</p>	<p>Lengthy hiring process</p>	
<p>There is no clear strategy for the employment in the university. The admission period of hiring new faculty members is also not clear, not specific and the process is too long (participant #4).</p>	<p>No clear strategy for employment</p>	
<p>There is also no consistency between the objectives of the Deanship of Faculty Members and Staff Affairs and the university objectives (participant #9).</p>	<p>No consistency</p>	<p>Limited coordination between departments and units</p>
<p>Limited coordination between deanships in carrying out human resources practices caused gap between HR departments, colleges, divisions and academic staff. The gap exists as a result of duplication and conflict in the responsibilities between departments within the university (participant #5).</p>	<p>Limited coordination</p>	

<p>The power to make decisions in most human resources practices is not in the hands of the general administration of the faculty and staff members but in the hands of other departments. I expect that if all HR practices were managed and implemented by our management (Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs), the achievement would be much greater than the current situation. (participant #22).</p>	<p>Power struggle</p>	<p>Power struggle</p>
<p>Designing and performing HR functions by other parties caused power struggle in decision making because that there are many units design and perform some of the HR functions without fully knowledge about what other units do. This leads us (the Deanship of Faculty and Staff Affairs) to lose the good planning, which helps us to achieve the objectives of the vision and mission of the university (participant #15).</p>	<p>Power struggle in decision making</p>	
<p>Our department (the Deanship of Faculty and Staff Affairs) announces the vacancies of faculty members based on the needs sent by the departments and colleges. The role of Human Resources Management is limited to printing the final decision of the applicant. Candidates are selected to fill these positions through departments and colleges. Then, the candidate is approved by the rector. Our role is limited to print the rector's decision in order for the candidate to commence his work (participant #16).</p>	<p>Limited role</p>	<p>Loss of credibility and recognition</p>
<p>The establishment of the Deanship of Faculty Members and Staff Affairs is significant in managing HR but is not recognised. What is noticeable in our university is that the deanship has a limited role and lack of recognition because that the power of the deanship in designing and performing HR functions are fragmented between the deanship and other units within the university. From my perspective, I think this reason made the role of HR department is limited (Participant #27).</p>	<p>Lack of recognition</p>	
<p>Rules and Regulations: There are some rules and regulations that cannot be ignored. This is due to the connection between the university and other ministries such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Civil Service, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Labor. This connection limited the role of HR department in Saudi universities (participant #11).</p>	<p>Rules and regulations</p>	<p>Governance regulatory requirements</p>

3.5 Findings

The thematic data analysis technique employed in this study yielded five key themes: (1) duplication of HRM functions, (2) limited coordination between departments and units, (3) power struggle, (4) lack of recognition, and (5) government regulatory constraints. Below are the findings that point to tensions and challenges in the devolvement of HR practices that undermine progression of strategic HRM in Saudi higher education institutions.

3.5.1 Duplication and role ambiguity of HRM functions

Duplication in managing and implementing HR processes and practices emerged as a major challenge in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions due to overlapping in designing and supervising HR functions between the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs and other deanships. Participants identified and acknowledged that HRM practices and processes were fragmented and not overseen by a single unit or department. The HRM processes and practices are designed and implemented by different units and departments besides the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs, which was established mainly to manage HRM issues across the various units and faculties. One key participant indicated:

“The fact that there is duplication in managing human resources practices at the university. There is an independent deanship called the Deanship of Faculty and Staff Affairs, but this Deanship does not freely practice all human resources practices because there are other deanships that supervise some of the human resources practices” (participant #4).

The overlapping in HRM processes and practices makes the process of completing HRM tasks too long because it generates unnecessary delays. Several participants explained that due to the duplication and overlapping in the design and implementation of HRM practices and processes within the university, there is ambiguity and delay in the process of recruiting new academic staff. This delay occurs irrespective of whether the university intends to recruit from the domestic or foreign labour market. The participants further noted that in some circumstances unnecessary delays in the

recruitment processes led to the loss of talent to other universities.

“The basic impediment is the length of the procedures: sometimes we want to recruit faculty members, but the long procedures might allow that applicant to contract with other organisations. The issue is also more complicated when any department of the university has to attract faculty members from outside the Kingdom because there is a great competition among the universities around the world to attract the competent and experienced faculty members” (participant #11).

Another participant indicated that:

“There is no clear strategy for the employment in the university. The admission period of hiring new faculty members is also not clear, not specific and the process is too long. For example, you may find a faculty member joining the department or college at the beginning of the semester and after a certain period of time; another faculty member might join the department and so on. There must be a definite and clear period for this process to accept faculty members, so the department and the faculty can choose the best candidate and the most efficient” (participant # 4).

One participant noted that undue delays contributed to the problem of duplication, creating some bottlenecks for academic staff when they seek approval to attend international conferences or workshops. The approval process in most universities in Saudi Arabia involves several units and departments, and this makes the processes more complicated and time wasting. One participant noted that:

“The procedures are very long within the university. Sometimes the date of the conference is over and the university has not yet made the decision, because the decision and treatment must be approved by more than one person” (participant #21).

3.5.2 Limited coordination between departments and units

The lack of coordination between the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel affairs and other units or deanships that manage and administer some HRM functions was found to be an evolving obstacle to efficiency that undermines the effectiveness of HRM processes and practices in Saudi higher education institutions. Although many units and deanships design and perform some HRM functions, there is no coordination among them in performing these

functions. This has led to the establishment of different HRM processes and practices in different departments. It has also created agitation among academic staff from the same work environment about variations in administrative procedures, which explicitly undermines the principles of fairness and procedural justice. For instance, while the immediate supervisors of academic staff usually conduct employee performance assessment and training needs, the deanship in charge of training and development does not seek input from the heads of schools and departments before employees are selected for further training and development. The implication is that training programs identified by the deanship in charge of training and development are inconsistent with staff training needs. As such, training programs are not based on the assessments of staff training needs, which are usually drawn from employee performance evaluation reports. One participant said:

“Training and development exist at the university, but it is not strategically planned. The training courses at the university are not based on the actual need, but in unorganised way” (participant #5).

The lack of coordination between deanships and heads of schools has significantly undermined the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs in acting as a strategic partner to map out strategies to assist the universities in remaining competitive. Several participants demonstrated that the current work of the Deanship of Faculty Members and Personnel Affairs is not strategic and does not support the long-term strategic direction of the universities. Clearly, the evidence points to some indifference and inconsistencies between the objectives of the Deanship of Faculty Members and Staff Affairs, the university, and other parties within the university.

“The current work of the Deanship is an action that is not strategic and does not suit the long term as it has only an executive role” (participant #1).

It was also noted that:

“There is also no consistency between the objectives of the Deanship of Faculty Members and Staff Affairs and the University objectives” (participant #9).

Another participant asserted that the indifference arises not only from differences between the objectives of the Deanship of Faculty Members and

Staff Affairs and the university, but also exists within the deanship itself, within colleges and divisions, and among academic staff. This divergence in HRM thinking results from a lack of coordination in designing and implementing HRM practices within the universities.

One participant mentioned:

“Limited coordination between deanships in carrying out human resources practices caused gap between HR departments, colleges, divisions and academic staff. The gap exists as a result of duplication and conflict in the responsibilities between departments within the university” (participant #5).

3.5.3 Power struggle

The fact that different units perform similar HRM functions that were originally within the domain of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs has generated hostile relationships between HRM departments and other faculties. This hostility is the result of power struggles about who ultimately has the mandate to make decisions relating to staff recruitment and selection, staff development and employee promotion. The power struggle in decision making affects the unity of command and unity of direction principles in the various universities. The power struggle has led to the narrowing of the functions of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs within Saudi higher education institutions to administrative HRM functions, with limited or no opportunity to carry out their mandated functions. A participant noted:

“The power to make decisions in most human resources practices is not in the hands of the general administration of the faculty and staff members but in the hands of other departments. I expect that if all HR practices were managed and implemented by our management (Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs), the achievement would be much greater than the current situation” (participant #22).

Another key participant reiterated that:

“Designing and performing HR functions by other parties caused power struggle in decision making because that there are many units design and perform some of the HR functions without fully knowledge about what other units do. This leads us (the Deanship of Faculty and Staff Affairs) to lose the good planning, which helps us to achieve the

*objectives of the vision and mission of the university”
(participant #15).*

In most academic work contexts, there exist some shared and complementary responsibilities between HRM departments and deans and heads of schools, but the usurping of HRM responsibility by deans and heads of schools in Saudi universities has become entrenched in their operations. The deans and heads of schools demonstrate ultimate authority in administering significant HRM functions but, in some cases, have exhibited limited knowledge and capabilities in this regard. Nevertheless, the failure of any HRM processes or practices carried out by the deans and heads of schools is generally attributed to the HRM department because these processes and skills are their mandated functions.

Although the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs was established mainly to deal with all HRM-related processes and practices, it is unable to freely perform or control such HRM processes and practices. For example, some participants complained about the method of academic staff recruitment and the selection of non-Saudi or foreign nationals. These recruitments are generally done by an ad-hoc committee, which is established annually without the involvement or knowledge of the HRM department. Participants in HRM departments bemoaned that recruitment and selection of staff are shrouded in secrecy. The implication is that such recruitment processes have contributed to the high rate of academic staff turnover in some universities. The evidence further points to the open display of power and influence in the recruitment and selection processes for academic staff, particularly non-Saudi academics, by some actors. For example, in most instances, the ad-hoc committee established with the mandate to source foreign talents in some specific academic fields or domains does not have the requisite skills and capabilities to intensively evaluate the competencies and academic standards of potential applicants. One participant explained:

“Non-Saudis academic staff are contracted through committees formed by the university administration. The power of dean head of school will play a significant role in recruiting and selecting new applicants. In some cases, the choice is made by the dean of the college and he is responsible for recruiting faculty members in his college.

In some other cases, only the committee formed by the university administration is responsible to recruit faculty members from those countries. The problem here is the committee formed by the university is usually not specialised in the major they seek to recruit. Meaning that, the dean and head of the department have no role in selecting and recruiting faculty members in their colleges” (participant #6).

3.5.4 Loss of credibility and recognition

The evidence also points to the limited role of the HR departments and their lack of recognition by others. Participants from the HRM units bemoaned the lack of recognition by some deans and heads of colleges. The lack of recognition has instigated the narrowing of the functions of HRM departments in Saudi universities. Basically, HRM departments now perform two administrative functions: issuing employment letters and advertising job vacancies. Key HRM functions that should be performed by the HRM department are within the domain of the deans and heads of colleges. A participant said:

“Our department (the Deanship of Faculty and Staff Affairs) announces the vacancies of faculty members based on the needs sent by the departments and colleges. The role of human resources management is limited to printing the final decision of the applicant. Candidates are selected to fill these positions through departments and colleges. Then, the candidate is approved by the rector. Our role is limited to print the rector’s decision in order for the candidate to commence his work” (participant #16).

This situation demonstrates that the importance of the Deanship of Faculty Members and Staff Affairs, with its HRM capabilities and knowledge, is not fully recognised by the top management of the universities and faculties. This interviewee notes the significance of the deanship and lack of recognition of its contribution to managing HRM functions:

“The establishment of the Deanship of Faculty Members and Staff Affairs is significant in managing HR but is not recognised. What is noticeable in our university is that the deanship has a limited role and lack of recognition because that the power of the deanship in designing and performing HR functions are fragmented between the deanship and other units within the university. From my perspective, I think this reason made the role of HR department is

limited” (participant #27).

3.5.5 Governance regulatory requirements

The participants also acknowledged state regulatory and procedural complexities in administering HRM functions in Saudi universities. The link between Saudi universities and other ministries suggests the absence of autonomy in Saudi higher education institutions in implementing HRM policies. Saudi public universities must follow regulations established by the Ministry of Education, which is the body responsible for all educational issues within the Kingdom. Additionally, in terms of the adoption of some HRM policies and practices, Saudi universities operate within the dictates of other ministries such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Civil Services. This makes the HRM operations in universities even more complex.

The limited autonomy and flexibility of management in adopting and initiating strategic HRM systems that work well for universities in attracting talent, have been attributed to procedural complexities emanating from the ministries and agencies responsible for higher education. For example, even though the universities are given some level of independence to carry out their functions, when recruiting foreign nationals, some clearance and approvals are required from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Civil Services. These requirements contribute to delays in the whole recruitment and selection processes. One key participant said:

“Non-independence of Saudi universities. In other words, Saudi universities must follow the regulations and legislations of the Ministry of Education and other ministries such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Civil Service, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Labor. As a result, the HR department at the university has an executive and limited role. In other words, the university cannot legislate the rules and regulations that it deems appropriate for the university because the university is obliged to follow the higher education systems under the Ministry of Education” (participant #1).

Another participant mentioned:

“Rules and Regulations: There are some rules and

regulations that cannot be ignored. This is due to the connection between the university and other ministries such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Civil Service, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Labor. This connection limited the role of HR department in Saudi universities” (participant #11).

3.6 Discussion and implications for strategic HRM alignment

The capability of Saudi Arabia to build a robust human capital is underpinned by the alignment of HRM processes and practices to support higher education institutions. This study highlights several tensions and challenges which hinder progress toward achieving a strategic HRM focus and delay people development in Saudi Arabia. First, duplication and role ambiguity in HRM functions between the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs and other deanships in Saudi higher education institutions generally affect the effective implementation of HRM practices and processes. The overlapping of duties generates unnecessary delays in completing HRM tasks. HRM is an integral unit of the business strategic process, where the first order of strategy brings long-term direction for the organisation and the second order brings internal operating procedures needed to accomplish organisational goals (Purcell, 1999). However, the evidence in Saudi higher education settings does not support either the first or second order of strategy. The role of HRM departments in Saudi higher education institutions has been relegated to a second-class status in which they only perform administrative HRM duties. In some instances, the HRM department lacks recognition and legitimacy to carry out its mandated responsibilities. This evidence clearly undermines the contemporary strategic HRM notion of performing activities beyond administrative tasks to develop innovative HRM practices in support of organisational strategic goals (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

As part of the Vision 2030 ambitions, the country seeks to position its higher education sector within the global education space, particularly as an avenue to attract foreign students from Asia and Africa. This strategy forms part of the broader diversification strategy of the economy. Such an outcome is

associated with well-governed universities that can operationalise well-designed, devolved HRM processes and practices. The tensions and challenges uncovered do not align with the government's initiative to position Saudi higher education as a global education contender and attract international students from the Asian and African regions.

The Saudi Arabian higher education institutions need a well-designed and well-governed HRM environment that enables Saudi universities to attract world-class staff and to provide them with adequate training opportunities and reward systems to improve teaching and learning quality and increase research output and impact. Considering the current tensions and challenges in HRM management and organisation within Saudi Arabian higher education, it appears that the capacity to build a world-class academic staff base to support teaching and research may not be achieved. Primarily, the recruitment and selection processes to evaluate the actual capabilities of potential applicants, particularly foreign nationals, is critically impeded as a result of these tensions. This is predicated on the grounds that recruitment and selection processes are carried out in secrecy in accordance with individuals' in-group relationships and tribal lines. In some cases, the failure of the ad hoc committees to involve deans and heads of colleges in the recruitment of foreign nationals leads to the recruitment of applicants ill-fitted for positions, which produces long-term disadvantages for the universities (Robertson, 2007).

The power struggles and the limited coordination between the university departments results in departments designing and implementing HRM processes and practices in isolation from the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs, creating performance evaluation challenges. For instance, academic staff appraisals are undertaken by heads and deans of colleges. However, training and development programs are designed by units and are not aligned with the performance evaluation reports of academic staff. This arrangement results in training programs provided or recommended for individual academics that are not aligned with their training and development needs. This contradicts the purpose of training and development.

Effective HRM processes and practices cannot operate in isolation from other

departments (Amalou-Döpke & Süß, 2014). The limited coordination has also created an environment of agitation among academic staff in relation to various administrative procedures and explicitly undermines the principles of fairness, and procedural justice (Blader & Tyler, 2003). The strategic HRM literature recommends HR departments be designed to strategically manage employees as a business resource and a tool for achieving and sustaining competitiveness (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015). The Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs (HR managers) must play a role as consultants to the various units and colleges; they must advise supervisors and managers on issues related to HRM and assist the organisation to achieve its goals. In the Saudi Arabian context, the work of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs is not strategic or does not support the long-term goals of universities due to the absence of a well-structured link between the strategic direction of the universities and the Deanship of Faculty Members and Staff Affairs.

Saudi higher education institutions have limited autonomy and independence. By extension, this weakens the ability of publicly funded universities to adapt and manage strategic HRM processes and practices because the universities must operate within the framework of various ministries and agencies, especially regarding the employment of foreign nationals. These regulatory and procedural complexities limit strategic HRM initiatives because approvals are required from various ministries and departments. This interference from other government ministries reduces a university's ability to establish its own academic agencies, staffing, budgeting and HRM policies (Alkhazim, 2003). This has also contributed to a loss of talent during the recruitment and selection processes. The situation has further been aggravated by the power struggle over HRM functions, which creates additional delays. Some Deanships of Faculty Members and Staff Affairs alluded to the significant loss of potential highly qualified and talented staff to other universities, particularly private universities, where HRM systems are generally well-structured with no role ambiguity. Some strands of the recruitment and selection literature highlight that unnecessary procedural processes potentially push some applicants to abandon hope of employment and voluntarily withdraw from the recruitment process, contributing to the

loss of talented applicants (Arvey, Gordon, Massengill, & Mussio, 1975).

Recent efforts by the government are designed to assist higher education institutions to support its HRD strategy, which focuses on enriching local people and preparing skilled workers to meet the future demands of the growing economy. The government's investment in higher education is also part of the attempt to close the supply and demand gap in local skills in general, and in vocational education (Mellahi & Wood, 2013). The tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HRM practices and processes in Saudi higher education institutions potentially affect the capability of universities to provide appropriate training to develop human capital. These HRM challenges and tensions will affect the country's desire to achieve its Vision 2030 ambitions and hinder progress toward a strategic HRM focus and people development.

Management of key HRM practices and processes by a single unit sets a clear direction to support achieving organisational goals (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). The unity of command principle is an essential concept that can assist Saudi universities to reach their goals and avoid incompatible expectations (Anand, Gardner, & Morris, 2007) and power struggles from role ambiguity among departments. Considering the current role of HRM in the Saudi Arabian higher education context, role duplication, power struggles and the limited coordination among departments clearly have created dual chains of commands, breeding conflict and undermining management and organisation of HRM processes and practices. Further, role ambiguity impedes the principle of unity of command in HRM in terms of staff recruitment and selection procedures, staff development programs and performance appraisals systems in the various universities. This generally undermines strategic HRM advancement in corporate institutions and organisations (Junni, Sarala, Tarba, Liu, & Cooper, 2015). The evidence suggests a clear need to align HRM processes and practices within Saudi Arabian higher education institutions. Adopting a strategic HRM alignment in the management and organisation of HRM processes and practices would create an enabling management environment for the interaction between the HRM department and deans of schools and colleges, since both actors

contribute to ensuring organisational goals are achieved.

A strategic alignment would be fundamental to supporting the advancement of HRM that focuses on enriching the national skills to meet the future demands of a growing economy and building a robust skill set for achieving Vision 2030. A strategic HRM alignment in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions may help rejuvenate HRM by building an integrated set of processes and practices across the various faculties and colleges in support of the main business functions (Amalou-Döpke & Süß, 2014). The effective management and organisation of HRM processes and practices in higher education represent a major management challenge as highlighted by HRM managers. However, the study participants thought that strategic HRM alignment could result from a two-way process (Ahlvik, Smale, & Sumelius, 2016) that addresses the limited coordination between HRM and deans of schools and colleges. In the higher education context, substantial HRM processes and practices are often assumed by faculties (deans and heads of schools). Therefore, strategic HRM alignment must be built on a shared understanding between the HR unit and faculty deans regarding the overall competitiveness of the institution and how HRM processes and practices can be harnessed.

From the above discussion, the study offers specific recommendations for higher education leaders and HRM practitioners to address these tensions and challenges. Saudi universities should consider the importance of having an effective HR department. The HR department should be the heart of an organisation that designs and implements HRM practices that suit the organisation and meet its strategic and sustainable goals. Therefore, higher education leaders and HRM practitioners need to redesign the role of the HR department to allow it to manage and design HRM practices that assist universities in achieving their goals. This redesign should also support coordination among the HR department and other university units. Designing and managing HRM practices within a single unit that coordinates with other units will support the HR departments to move from an administrative function only to units that can help the universities achieve their strategic goals.

3.7 Chapter summary and directions for further research

The high level of HRM devolved to deans and heads of schools and colleges has created power struggles, duplication and role ambiguity around HRM functions, loss of credibility, and execution complications. These tensions and challenges have further been heightened by HR managers' resistance to changes due to uncertainties of losing their status and legitimacy. In addition, the lack of both recognition of the HR unit and coordination between the unit and faculties points to limited evidence of strategic HRM and potentially limits progress toward strategic HRM. In Saudi Arabian higher education institutions, comparable HRM functions between departments and HR units has impeded the ability of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs to become a strategic partner in managing HRM or supporting the long-term goals and strategies of universities. The limited role of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs in universities' HRM functions has undermined the notion of contemporary HRM – that is, HR units with functions beyond administrative HRM in order to develop innovative HRM practices that support organisational strategy. This research was conducted in Saudi Arabia; hence, the opportunities to generalise the findings to other contexts are limited owing to the unique culture and structure of the higher education system in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, caution is required in interpreting these findings in relation to other contexts. Despite this limitation, this study provides important insights into the tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR practices in the Middle Eastern Region – an underexplored research context.

Future studies should therefore extend to other contexts with different geopolitical dynamics, cultures and institutional arrangements. In addition, the ownership and funding structure of publicly funded higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia are directly under the control of the King, which may cause, at least in part, the power struggles, lack of coordination, limited recognition of HR units, and regulatory and procedural complexities. Therefore, extending this study to the context of privately-owned universities may uncover different tensions and challenges in the devolvement of HR

practices.

The next chapter (Chapter 4) discusses the second objective of the study (Essay 2).

Objective 2: To explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered.

Submission journal: *Personnel Review*.

Title of paper: One glass, different shapes: Human resource development practices in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector.

CHAPTER 4. Essay 2. One Glass, Different Shapes: Human resource development practices in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector

4.1 Chapter outline

This chapter, which is Essay 2, comprises seven major sections. An introduction to the study and the main research question are presented in Section 4.2. Section 4.3 is a literature review of the theoretical framework and the leadership of human resource development and human resource management practices in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. Section 4.4 describes the research method of the study, including the study design, selection of participants and case studies, and data collection and analysis. Section 4.5 presents the findings of the study. In section 4.6, the findings are discussed and implications drawn. Finally, the limitations and a summary of the study are presented in Section 4.7.

4.2 Introduction

Foreign-born workers have become an important part of Saudi Arabia's economy over the past three decades (Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014). Employment of foreign-born workers in Saudi Arabia has been growing at an annual rate of 4% since 2000 (Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014). In 2017, with an estimated population of 32.6 million people, approximately 12.6 million were foreign-born nationals, accounting for 37% of the total population (General Authority for Statistics, 2019). Although foreign-born workers are widespread across all sectors, the education sector in particular relies heavily on foreign-born workers. For example, the higher education sector has a workforce of 67,829 workers, of which 26,430 (39%) are foreign-born nationals (Ministry of Education, 2019). Data from the Ministry of Education further suggest that 63% of the professorial positions in Saudi universities are occupied by foreign-born nationals.

Saudi Arabia is among the few countries with a significant foreign-born workforce within the education sector (Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered. This chapter contributes to the contextual body of knowledge regarding HRD in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector, given the scarcity of HRD literature in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Moideenkutty et al., 2011; Saheem et al., 2017), and particularly in the context of localisation policies such as the "Saudisation" process that underpins HRD. Another important contribution of this essay to HRD is that the GCC countries tend to rely heavily on foreign labour, so the study's implications could extend to other country contexts. With the aging of the population and declining fertility rates in the region, reliance on and competition for foreign labour may increase – therefore, although equity theory is well established, workplace equity is gaining prominence in terms of practices associated with foreign labour.

In the Middle Eastern region, concerns with HRD have gained momentum, particularly as the region has become highly dependent on foreign skilled

labour in various sectors of the countries' economies (Glaub & Frese, 2011). In addition, Ayentimi et al. noted that "in recent times, the Middle East, especially the GCC – Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates – are the new entrants in attracting skills and talents from Africa" (Ayentimi, Burgess, & Dayaram, 2018, p. 14). The region has witnessed a shortage of skilled labour, which has necessitated several national policy shifts and public-sector reforms aimed at driving economic transformation through moving away from oil dependence (Khorsheed, 2015).

The Vision 2030 aims to position the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a global investment powerhouse and enable the Kingdom to stimulate economic growth and diversification (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). As part of the Vision 2030, the government committed significant resources, including funding and infrastructure, to develop the higher education sector. A key element of the Vision 2030 was the launching of the King Salman Program for HRD. This program is intended to address training and capacity development, performance management, spiritual and emotional support, talent management, workforce planning, and leadership development (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). Building staff capabilities in the higher education sector has a compounding effect and supports the Vision 2030 initiative that seeks to address human capital needs. The higher education sector remains the focal point for effectively building capacity and academic staff capability in research, teaching, and community engagement.

HRD processes are ongoing and are primarily concerned with developing workforce skills and managing talent (Garavan, McCarthy, & Carbery, 2019; Nolan & Garavan, 2016; Swanson, Holton, & Holton, 2001). HRD opportunities for academic staff and researchers have the potential to improve research and teaching performance, which is critical for building globally recognised academic institutions in Saudi Arabia (Brewer, Brewer, & Hilton, 1990; Ginns, Kitay, & Prosser, 2010). Higher education institutions must provide effective and ongoing HRD opportunities and support that positively influence staff research and teaching performance (Gulbrandsen & Smeby, 2005). Academics share their knowledge through publications, conferences,

workshops, and seminars. These internal and external learning platforms encourage staff collaboration and allow the transfer of explicit and tacit knowledge, both at the institutional level and across industries and sectors (Abdul-Jalal, Toulson, & Tweed, 2013). The various learning platforms available for academic staff can not only improve research quality and maximise research funding and publication outputs, but also expand and strengthen their contributions to the wider society (Mansor, Mustaffa, & Salleh, 2015).

Therefore, well-crafted and balanced HRD processes aligned to the research and teaching performance of academic staff and to the knowledge-transfer mechanisms for non-Saudi academics will directly and indirectly contribute to developing human capabilities and building capacity within Saudi universities. Knowledge-sharing mechanisms will support Saudi universities to build knowledge-based competitive capabilities (Minbaeva, Foss, & Snell, 2009). Although universities in the Middle Eastern region are increasingly facing challenges, they are working to develop strategic knowledge resources in order to achieve sustained competitiveness in the higher education market. Therefore, Saudi universities need to embed processes for developing, managing, and transferring knowledge within their institutions to achieve sustainable growth (Mahdi, Nassar, & Almsafir, 2019).

4.3 Literature review

4.3.1 Theoretical framework: Equity theory

Equity theory provides insight into the consequences of employees' perception of fairness in the workplace and in society more generally (Ryan, 2016). Equity theory offers an important lens and contributes to understanding how HRD opportunities are administered in a university work setting among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers. It can also uncover practical and social implications for the Saudi government's strategic vision for developing human capabilities in the higher education sector. Although equity theory is one of the early theories categorised under the process dimension of motivation (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987), it continues to

provide important guidance on how individuals in organisations make choices on whether to work hard, based on their own preferences, rewards and likely outcomes (Lazaroiu, 2015).

Equity theory is built on the notion of social comparison, which argues that employees evaluate their contribution by comparing it with the contribution of others (Huseman et al., 1987). Employee inputs include expertise, time, experience, effort, interpersonal skills, qualifications, and intangible personal qualities, while outcomes include the monetary compensation, flexible work arrangements and non-wage benefits, and career-development opportunities provided by the employer (Carrell & Dittrich, 1978). Employees who perceive or feel inequity seek to decrease their effort in several ways: they can alter inputs and/or outputs in their mind (cognitive distorting), can request further incentives, or can leave the organisation. Employees perceive inequity as a by-product of organisational injustice (Lazaroiu, 2015). Perceived inequity profoundly effects employee morale, efficiency, productivity, and turnover (Tsui, Enderle, & Jiang, 2018).

Equity theory recognises that the absolute returns individuals receive for their efforts are not the main concern; rather, the focus is the relationship of their returns to others' returns (Sprecher, 2018). Ramlall (2004) noted that, based on inputs such as experience, effort, competence, and education, individuals compare outcomes such as increased recognition, salary levels, and other factors. The expected consequences of perceived inequity may include reducing their input through directly limiting their work output, or seeking wage increases or a more enjoyable work assignment (Robbins, Ford, & Tetrick, 2012). Employees may also decrease their outcomes until the ratio of their outcomes to incomes is relatively equal; they may also quit their job when they perceive unfairness or an imbalance between their input–output ratio and that of others (Ramlall, 2004). Providing employees with an equal and fair system for balancing their input–output ratios is the basis for motivation (Tsui et al., 2018). Carrell and Dittrich (1978) argue that equity theory is conceptualised on three underpinning assumptions. First, the theory assumes that individuals hold beliefs about what creates a fair and equitable return for their inputs to their job. Second, the theory assumes that individuals

exchange what they have with their managers compared with what the individuals perceive. Third, the theory assumes that when individuals feel or observe that they are not treated equitably in terms of the exchange they perceive others are making, they are inspired to take actions as they see appropriate to address the perceived inequity.

In the workplace, the notion of equity is interpreted as a positive link between the individual's input or effort, performance on the job and the returns the individual receives (Blau & Boal, 1987). Adams (1965) proposed that employee expectations about equity or a fair relationship between inputs and outputs are learned during the process of socialisation by comparison with the inputs and outputs of others. In addition, Sprecher (2018) argues that individuals feel inequity when they observe inequitable treatment in return for their efforts and other contributions. Ethical organisations place strong emphasis on organisational justice and equity (Lueg & Studen, 2017; H. Zhang, Li, Frenkel, & Zhang, 2019).

The evolving management literature highlights the importance of organisational justice and its positive influence on organisational citizenship behaviour (Zehir, Akyuz, Eren, & Turhan, 2016), organisational commitment (Wang, Liao, Xia, & Chang, 2010), trust (Agarwal, 2014), high moral standards (Uen, Chen, Chen, & Lin, 2016), and work performance (Wang et al., 2010). Inequity can influence employee turnover intentions, but also can potentially contribute to negative outcomes such as decreased work performance and increased withdrawal behaviour (Uen et al., 2016). The organisational psychology literature has demonstrated that perceptions of organisational injustice are linked to stress, which contributes to psychological strain, decreased organisational commitment (Wang et al., 2010), decreased job performance, increased employee compensation claims, and increased sick leave (Ybema, van der Meer, & Leijten, 2016).

4.3.2 Leadership of human resource development and human resource management practices in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector

Human Resource Management (HRM) and HRD are intertwined: HRD is one of the key sub-functions of HRM and is narrowly linked to developing skills,

increasing employee knowledge, and advancing employee competencies and capabilities (Alagaraja, Egan, & Woodman, 2017; Swanson et al., 2001). HRM integrates a wide range of activities – attraction, development, retention, and performance management of employees – to support organisational competitiveness (Alagaraja et al., 2017); HRD is a fundamental component within this HRM spectrum. HRD represents an ongoing organisational effort to improve employee capabilities and performance and their self-fulfilment through a variety of upskilling and reskilling programs. Recently, HRD has been broadly applied, from instruction in highly firm-specific job skills to development of long-term professional skills (Bell, Tannenbaum, Ford, Noe, & Kraiger, 2017).

HRD has emerged as a formal organisational function and an integral aspect of organisational strategy (Jaworski, Ravichandran, Karpinski, & Singh, 2018). Organisations of all sizes have embraced the notion of “lifelong learning” or “continual learning”, and other aspects of HRD, to promote employee growth and develop a highly skilled workforce (Wals & Benavot, 2017). Further, creating a corporate culture that supports lifelong learning – that is, continually improving employees’ skills through HRD – is now widely acknowledged as an important factor in supporting long-term organisational success and profitability (Jaworski et al., 2018). The extant literature documents a positive impact of HRD on the performance of both individuals and organisations (Janev, Hadzi-Vasileva, & Sofijanovska, 2018; Jaworski et al., 2018; Langmann & Thomas, 2017). HRD aims to increase employees’ knowledge and skills, thus serving as a source of motivation (Massenberg, Schulte, & Kauffeld, 2017). It also provides new or existing employees with the skills and knowledge they need to perform a task (Bell et al., 2017). Moreover, HRD contributes to developing positive views in employees toward growth and change as they are enacted by individuals and groups (Flatt & Jacobs, 2018).

The leadership and management style and cultural mores in Saudi Arabia implicitly or explicitly influence HRD processes and, more broadly, HRM. Saudi Arabian culture is highly collectivist in orientation and is built on Islamic principles. Accordingly, there are reference groups of either “in-

groups” or “out-groups” (Mellahi & Wood, 2013). The in-group consists largely of members of the extended family and tribe. Typically, leaders and management prioritise their in-group members; their relationships are distinguished by protecting the in-group membership (Mellahi & Wood, 2013). In contrast, the out-group comprises non-kinsfolk and those from different religious and tribal groups. The relationship between managers and the out-group is based on work achievement and task-related performance targets (Mellahi & Wood, 2013). Although nepotism is condemned in the Western world, in Saudi Arabia it is an accepted principle in people management. Managers and organisations rely on family relationships to get things done, and nepotism is an entrenched HRM orientation (Al-Faleh, 1987; Bjerke & Al-Meer, 1993). Managers give priority to in-group relationships in business operations, which leads to hierarchical and unequal relationships and large disparities of power (Robertson, Al-Khatib, & Al-Habib, 2002). Typically, subordinates rarely disagree with managers’ decisions and authoritarianism is also entrenched in the management style as part of the Arabic culture (Scott & Michie, 2017). The authoritarian management style promotes the use of managerial discretion in decision making, with little consideration for establishing regulatory frameworks.

Despite the paucity of literature within the Saudi Arabian HRM context, the challenges that undermine general HRM effectiveness have been investigated. A recurring finding is the general lack of procedural consistency in administering HRM practices and processes (Bjerke & Al-Meer, 1993). For example, Harbi et al. (2017) found a lack of clarity of process in the conduct of performance management systems, and ambiguity in expectations of academic performance in many Saudi universities. Performance management systems are consistently thwarted by management’s discretionary use of subjective criteria. In addition, employees generally fail to seek feedback because they fear being victimised (Harbi et al., 2017). Although performance management should evaluate employee development and career needs, this systemic process remains underdeveloped because of these challenges (Decramer, Smolders, Vanderstraeten, & Christiaens, 2012). The true benefits of HRD are gained when an organisation determines its

mission and effective ways to achieve the mission through improving the effectiveness of individuals, teams, and the organisation (Janev et al., 2018). Prior literature (e.g. Jaworski et al., 2018; Safavi & Karatepe, 2018) has demonstrated both direct and indirect relationships between perceived HRD opportunities and employee outcomes. Providing high levels of HRD opportunities can be regarded as social exchange between managers and employees (Shapiro & Conway, 2004). When organisations invest in employees by developing them and treating them fairly, employees feel that they contribute significantly to developing and sustaining the organisation, which creates a feeling of employee obligation. This obligation in turn influences employees to support the organisation through organisational citizenship actions and behaviours that exceed the minimum requirements of employment (Shapiro & Conway, 2004).

HRD is expected to increase employees' capabilities, and thus contribute to the overall organisational performance (Alagaraja et al., 2017). Several studies have noted the positive link between HRD and performance. For example, Arthur, Bennett, Edens, and Bell (2003) found in a meta-analysis that, compared with no training, training had an overall positive effect on performance and job-related behaviours. Consistency in performance is perceived to stem from increasing trainees' self-efficacy and self-management skills. Barber (2004) and Davis and Yi (2004) found investment in HRD activities led to increased tacit skills, technical skills, and innovation. Morris, Alvarez, Barney, and Molloy (2017) observed investment in employee growth and development as a value-creation system for employees, a value that results in positive attitudes and behaviours that eventually influence organisational outcomes. Arguably, therefore, providing equitable HRD opportunities for both Saudi and foreign-born nationals – opportunities that are supported by a well-structured mechanism for knowledge transfer between the groups and that are linked to performance outcomes and outputs – will ultimately improve research and teaching performance in Saudi universities and support the repositioning of Saudi universities in global rankings (Usher & Savino, 2007).

4.4 Research methodology

This section begins by providing an overview and justification of the chosen research philosophy. It then proceeds to outline the research approach and strategy employed; elucidate the time perspective and data collection methods; and explain other methodological issues such as validity and reliability issues, ethical considerations, access to data collection, and data analysis.

4.4.1 Selection of research paradigm and methodology

Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1, discussed five major philosophies in management studies – positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism. After assessing the five research philosophies, the researcher chose interpretivism as the approach for the research to be undertaken. Bakker (2010) describes interpretivism as the research of social reality guided by the way humans make sense of the cultural environments and social settings around them. Also, King (2004) maintained that interpretivism is a significant philosophical study tradition that has contributed meaningfully to the development of qualitative research and social science studies in particular.

The philosophy of interpretivism holds that humans differ from physical phenomena because they create meanings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Interpretivism studies these meanings. Interpretivism claims that individuals and their social worlds cannot be studied in the same manner as physical phenomena. Therefore, social sciences research must differ from natural research rather than attempt to emulate it (Saunders, 2011). The aim of interpretative research is to generate fresh, greater understanding and interpretations of social worlds and contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how HRD opportunities are administered. After careful evaluation of the ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology proposed by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), this study employed interpretivism philosophy. Ontologically, this research shows that reality is about what is gained from the investigation. Epistemologically, the information collected from this

study is related to the study context. Also, the findings are valid because the collected data was gathered from participants in the studied context. Qualitative research design is a useful methodological approach that supports different disciplinary and epistemological positions. Lastly, axiologically, this study began with an issue and offered practical solutions to create future practices, which is consistent with interpretivism. In short, interpretivist philosophy is a suitable research paradigm to use to answer the research objective of the current study.

In the Middle Eastern region, concerns over HRD issues have gained momentum, particularly as the region has become highly dependent on foreign skilled labour in various sectors of countries' economies (Glaub & Frese, 2011). The contextual body of knowledge concerning HRD in the Saudi Arabian context remains limited and is scarce in the wider management literature on GCC countries (Moideenkutty et al., 2011; Saheem et al., 2017), particularly about localisation policies such as the Saudisation process that underpins HRD. An exploratory qualitative research study is timely and aligns with the increasing calls for researchers to engage in in-depth qualitative research in the HRD domain to improve the evidence base on HRD (Anderson, 2017; Levitt et al., 2018).

A qualitative study design is suitable because the HRD literature within the context of Saudi Arabia and the Middle Eastern region is generally underrepresented and unexploited (Moideenkutty et al., 2011), yet many of these countries rely heavily on foreign skills. Qualitative research design is a useful methodological approach that supports different disciplinary and epistemological positions. This design is appropriate given the diverse nature of HRM and its association with Islamic principles (religious sensitivity) and the collectivist cultural orientation in the Middle Eastern region (Anderson, 2017; Collinson & Rugman, 2010). The complex nature of HRM organisation in Saudi Arabia, coupled with the importance attached to naturalistic, interpretive, and holistic inquiry, strongly supported the choice of a qualitative research approach. It offers opportunities to draw evidence from many participants' lived experiences, realities, and opinions, and from the meanings they attach to HRD issues in their work environment. In addition,

the qualitative research design lends rigor to the dataset of this study that was drawn from relatively few participants but includes detailed, heavily contextualised descriptions from each source (Anderson, 2017; Levitt et al., 2018).

A research approach is essential because it helps the researcher to make informed decisions about the research methods to use and to choose the appropriate research strategies for the study. In addition, it helps the researcher select suitable research designs to address certain limitations (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). In this study, the inductive approach was chosen because the study is qualitative and the selected research philosophy is interpretivism. The application of an inductive approach is linked with qualitative methods for data collection and analysis (McLaren, 2010). Also, several authors have pointed out the significance of the interpretive paradigm in understanding and exploring complicated phenomena (Dixon et al., 2010; Fengqiao & Lin, 2010). In the GCC countries, the HRM system is complex; additionally, management studies are lacking (Jehanzeb, Rasheed, & Rasheed, 2012; Moideenkutty et al., 2011).

This study adopted the case study as a research strategy. The case study is appropriate for an inductive approach, especially when limited theoretical and empirical literature exists (McLaren, 2010).

4.4.2 Methodology and research design

4.4.2.1 Case study design

Case studies are a common research method in business research. The case study design is a technique of learning about a complicated phenomenon through comprehensive description and analysis of it in its contextual settings (Quinlan, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2019; Yin, 2017). The purpose of case studies is to analyse particular problems within the boundaries of a particular setting, situation or organisation (Quinlan et al., 2019). Case studies enable in-depth exploration of a specific issue either through single or multiple cases. Also, they assist the researcher to capture the complexities of real-life situations, so the phenomenon can be studied at a greater level of depth (Yin, 2017). The aim of the current study was to explore equity among Saudi

nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered. Hence, the case study strategy was the most appropriate research strategy for this study.

A mutable case study design was used for this study based on three reasons. First, the aim of this study was to explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered. Therefore, a case study strategy is the most suitable strategy to obtain in-depth information to address the research objective (Yin, 2017). Second, case study research can include multiple data sources or methods that need to be brought together at some stage, which ultimately leads to data triangulation (Lyon et al., 2015). In this study, the primary data collection was through in-depth interviews and was supported by using document analysis. Third, as mentioned earlier, the studied context suffers from a lack of management research; the case study design assists the researcher to undertake in-depth interviews to address the research objective.

4.4.2.2 Selection of participants and case studies

The study sampled six universities, which were selected on the following considerations. First, the six universities were purposively selected to reflect the different phases of growth of Saudi universities, namely, foundation, expansion and comprehensiveness, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Also, the chosen universities have different establishment dates and locations (Table 4-1). Two universities were established before 1974; two between 1975 and 1999; and two after 2000. The second criterion was “willingness to take part in the research” (Mansour et al., 2019). The variety of the selected universities increased the comprehensiveness of the investigation. It also provided the lens for the researcher to understand whether the administration of HRD opportunities across the different universities was similar or varied. The need to conduct a detailed investigation into the issues around HRD opportunities for Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers influenced decisions about participant numbers in the study. Yin (2014) supported small numbers of participants for studies that aim to explore a research phenomenon in detail

and in the context of scarce prior literature in order to develop theories that can potentially help frame an approach to an issue.

Table 4-1 Participating universities with dates of establishment and locations

University	Growth Phase	Establishment Date	Location in Country
University A	Foundation	Before 1975	Centre
University B	Expansion	Between 1975 & 1999	South
University C	Expansion	Before 1975	East
University D	Comprehensiveness	Between 1975 & 1999	West
University E	Comprehensiveness	After 2000	Centre
University F	Comprehensiveness	After 2000	South
Total	6 Universities		

Participants selected for the study included Saudi and non-Saudi academic staff who were lecturers, deans, heads of schools, or HR managers (). Initially, the researcher used a reputational sampling method, commonly known as snowballing sampling, to select more interviewees in each case study (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch,1993). The first interview participants were recruited through acquaintances. This was followed up using the snowballing sampling method: after conducting each interview, the participant was requested to refer someone who might have expertise in the study topic and information they could potentially provide. The snowballing technique appears effective in recruiting participants in studies that investigate sensitive issues, particularly if participants are potentially victimised.

The interviews were face-to-face and semi-structured; an interview guide provided broad scope and the flexibility to discuss HRD issues in detail and

opportunities within Saudi universities, including how academic staff, particularly foreign-born nationals, perceived inequity with their Saudi national counterparts. Prior to each interview, dates, times and locations were arranged and confirmed with the interviewees by telephone and e-mail three to five days before the interview session. At the beginning of each interview, the interviewees were provided with the participant information sheet, which included details about the study's purpose and interview questions, audio-recording permission and participant confidentiality. A consent form was signed by each interviewee before the interview was conducted.

The selected participants from each university were interviewed in depth using the face to-face semi-structured interview. The interviews lasted between 65 and 70 minutes and were audio-recorded. The length of the interview session was sufficient to collect detailed data about the study questions. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted and audio-recorded.

shows the profile of participants from each university who were interviewed. Most of the participants were lecturers, deans, heads of schools, and HR managers, including Saudi and non-Saudi academic staff.

Table 4-2 Background characteristics of participating universities

University	Key Informants						
	HR Managers	Nationality of HR Managers	Deans & Heads of School	Nationality of Deans & Heads of School	Lecturers	Nationality of Lecturers	Total Interviews
University A	1	Saudi	2	Saudi	2	Non-Saudi	5
University B	1	Saudi	3	1 Saudi participant 2 non-Saudi participants	2	Non-Saudi	6
University C	1	Saudi	2	1 Saudi participant 1 non-Saudi participant	2	Non-Saudi	5
University D	1	Saudi	1	non-Saudi	2	Non-Saudi	4
University E	1	Saudi	1	non-Saudi	2	Non-Saudi	4
University F	1	Saudi	1	non-Saudi	2	Non-Saudi	4
Total	6		10		12		28

4.4.2.3 Documents

The secondary data collection included material from print and electronic media sources, reports from reputable private media houses and prior literature. This secondary data allowed the researcher to triangulate the study's results using a variety data sources to build the credibility of interpretations of the data (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019).

4.4.3 Data collection procedure and instrument

Three steps were followed to gain access to the selected universities. The first step was to obtain sufficient information about the characteristics of the universities involved. The second step was to approach the universities by sending a formal letter requesting them to participate and explaining the purpose of the study. The letter addressed concerns such as the confidentiality and anonymity of the universities. To guarantee full access by the researcher, the third step was to follow up with reminders through e-mail and telephone.

The data sources included documents, prior literature and in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The interview guide provided a broad scope and much flexibility to explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered. The interviews were conducted in both English and Arabic because the official language in Saudi Arabia is Arabic but a few universities and departments offer programs with English as the mode of delivery. Overall, 20 face-to-face interviews were conducted in Arabic and 8 were conducted in English. The interviews conducted in Arabic were transcribed and further translated into English. To ensure reliability, a third reviewer independently reviewed the translation process (Brislin, 1980). Also, to ensure communicative validity during the interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study to all participants before each interview (Sandberg, 2005).

The research protocol was approved by the ethics review committee of the researcher's university. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality. The findings from the interviews were supported and triangulated with documents and local literature sources (see Ayentimi, Burgess, & Dayaram, 2017). To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents, the universities were given pseudonyms.

4.4.4 Time horizons

Studies can be cross-sectional or longitudinal, both of which are types of observational studies in which the participants are observed in their natural environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A cross-sectional study is described as an observational study in which data is gathered as a whole to study a population at a single point in time to investigate the connection between variables of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Quinlan et al., 2019). In contrast, a longitudinal study is defined as an observational study in which data is collected repeatedly from the same sample over an extended period. Depending on what kind of data needs to be acquired, a longitudinal study can last from a few years to decades (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Quinlan et al., 2019). In this study, cross-sectional studies were used to explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a

university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered. In academic research, cross-sectional studies are used widely due to time and cost constraints.

4.4.5 Data analysis

This study thoroughly assured validity and reliability. Reliability of studies focuses primarily on the reliability of information collection methods and analytical techniques. Validity, however, focuses on the study design and technique used in the research (Noble & Smith, 2015). In this study, the data sources included semi-structured interviews and document analysis for triangulation to ensure both reliability and validity of the findings. Also, to increase the credibility of the study, 10 interview transcripts were sent by email to the interviewees to comment on for verification and feedback (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017).

Nvivo™ software is considered a standard program for managing qualitative data (Roman et al., 2017). In this study, the transcripts were read before coding with Nvivo™ software. A thematic analysis using a constructivist approach was undertaken. The findings from the interviews were supported and triangulated with documents and local literature sources (see Ayentimi et al., 2017). Next, the data were analysed using thematic data analysis techniques, guided by the prior literature.

Though the findings presented in this paper are based on responses from both Saudi nationals and foreign-born nationals, the proportions of evidence from the two participant cohorts differ due to the sensitive nature of the research questions. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to solicit explicit (obvious) evidence of perceived inequity or unfairness from Saudi nationals about how HRD opportunities are delivered to them and foreign-born nationals. Thus, most of the evidence was appropriately drawn from foreign-born participants, which creates the potential for bias. Bias was controlled for in two ways. First, only information or evidence that was somewhat substantiated or verified by Saudi nationals was considered. Second, the researcher relied on data triangulation through credible secondary data sources such as print and electronic media sources, reports from reputable

private media houses and prior literature to corroborate the evidence presented by foreign-born workers.

The researcher used several methods to avoid the problem of bias while analysing the qualitative data. First, the researcher consulted the supervisory panel and other colleagues while coding the data. This helped to expose any inconsistencies between the researcher's interpretation and that of others. Second, the researcher verified data with additional data sources; thus, triangulation helped to support the researcher's interpretations (Lyon et al., 2015). Finally, the researcher asked the participants to review the results. In some cases, the researcher followed up with participants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations represented their beliefs fairly.

There were two orders of analysis (Gioia et al., 2013). First, descriptive codes that reflected the themes raised by the interviewees were created. Second, these initial descriptive codes were grouped into integrated conceptual themes that identified potential relationships and hierarchies, as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**

Figure 4-1 Node tree

Examples of supporting quotes from participants	First-order codes	Second-order codes
<p>In Saudi universities, academic staff, whether Saudi or non-Saudi, can attend or participate in external training and development courses such as conferences. However, there are conditions and requirements to be met. The difference is that Saudi academic staff get financial support to attend or participate, but our non-Saudi colleagues usually do not get any financial support.</p>	<p>Difference in financial support</p>	<p>Procedural differences</p>
<p>The University President may, on the recommendation of the Departmental Faculty Board and then the College Faculty Board, allow a faculty member to attend a conference or symposium, without the university bearing any expense.</p>	<p>No bearing cost</p>	
<p>There are training courses conducted by the university throughout the year to train faculty members in various fields. However, the university only supports Saudi members who wish to participate in conferences and training courses, but there are conditions and criteria to be met by the faculty member. These procedures are too long, which might cause faculty members to miss a particular conference.</p>	<p>Length of process</p>	
<p>We prefer to select Saudi academic staff to attend training and development courses. This does not mean we ignore our non-Saudi colleagues; but Saudi academic staff are permanent, while non-Saudi academic staff are under renewable contract and they will leave the university any time.</p>	<p>Preferences for Saudi academic staff</p>	
<p>There should be honesty in applying the principles of work equality. However, there are special considerations that distinguish between nationalities within the organisation's environment, especially training and development policy. This policy must be changed as soon as possible so that this university in particular, and higher education in the Kingdom in general, promote their reputation among other universities in the world. The international universities do not differentiate between faculty members but treat them in an excellent manner without distinguishing between them, so that they achieve their goals in a timely manner and with high quality</p>	<p>Distinguish between nationalities</p>	
<p>Saudi universities are trying to have a clear and transparent system for their employees. However, maybe in a few cases, some academic staff might use their networking and connections to speed up their transactions.</p>	<p>Networking and connections</p>	

<p>I think the way academic staff are selected for attending training and development courses is not fair. We are all undertaking equivalent responsibilities towards enhancing academic work. However, I feel administrative injustice in not nominating non-Saudi academic staff for attending training and development courses.</p>	<p>Administrative injustice</p>	<p>Managerial discretion</p>
<p>As for the support for conference attendance, it is restricted to only Saudi faculty members. For non-Saudis (contractors), there is a very big problem. This policy supporting Saudis and not non-Saudis contradicts to the nature of the work. When you hire someone to do a job, you must give them all the tools, facilities, and support needed to achieve the goals you need to achieve. But when you hire someone and do not give them some basic things, I expect that this does not help the organisation increase its efficiency and reputation among other organisations. Successful organisations provide all necessary tools to get the job done. This policy must be changed, which is the perception and distinction in the functional rights between Saudi and non-Saudi, because the two parties are striving to achieve one goal.</p>	<p>Limited support for foreign-born nationals</p>	<p>Limited HRD opportunities for foreign-born nationals</p>
<p>Our university provides training and development programs internally or abroad. For internal training and development programs, Saudis and non-Saudi academic staff can attend after taking the approval from the authorised unit or person. However, external training and development courses are restricted for Saudi academic staff.</p>	<p>External training and development courses are restricted for Saudi academic staff.</p>	
<p>I have been working in this university for almost 8 years and prior that I was an assistant professor in another Saudi university. During my time there and here now, I realised that Saudi academic staff have more opportunities than non-Saudi nationals in benefiting from training and development courses abroad.</p>	<p>Saudi have more opportunities in HRD than foreign-born workers.</p>	
<p>Although we non-Saudi academic staff form influential number in the KSA [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] higher education, we have limited opportunity in participating in the external training and development programs such as international conferences and so on. We wish that the university change this policy and treat us fairly.</p>	<p>Limited opportunity</p>	

4.5 Results

The findings presented in this essay are based on the lived experiences of participants who had worked in their respective universities for more than six years and were thus well placed to share their lived experiences, opinions, and perceptions about the manner in which HRD support and opportunities were made available to Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers. Based on the content analysis, three main themes emerged: (1) procedural differences, (2) managerial discretion, and (3) selective restrictions in accessing HRD opportunities for foreign-born nationals.

4.5.1 Theme I: Procedural differences

In the Saudi Arabian higher education sector, there is institutionalised distinction between Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in different domains. For example, tenured positions characterised by a high level of job security and a fixed annual wage increment are assigned to Saudi nationals (Alkhazim, 2003) while non-permanent positions are assigned to foreign-born faculty members. In addition, the wages of Saudi nationals are generally determined on the basis of length of service and rank, not on job performance. The appointment of non-Saudi academic staff is characterised by renewable contracts, negotiable salaries, and fringe benefits contingent upon their area of specialisation, academic credentials, and market demand (Alkhazim, 2003). The evidence further highlights that the salary scale for Saudi nationals is higher than that for foreign-born faculty members (*Statute Governing the Employment of Non- Saudis at Universities* 1996, p. 16). The shortage of skilled faculty members within the domestic labour market occasioned the interest in foreign-born workers to increase the competitiveness of Saudi Arabian universities in research outputs and teaching. Within the job description that outlines the duties and responsibilities of faculty members, both Saudi nationals and foreign-born faculty members are required to work 40 hours per week on teaching, research, academic counselling, and other administrative functions assigned by the university:

“Members of the teaching staff, lecturers, demonstrators, and language teacher will have a forty-hour working week spent in teaching, research, academic counselling,

administrative, and other academic activities assigned by the university” (Article 15 of the Charter for Employment of Non-Saudi Staff).

“In Saudi universities, Academic staff whether Saudi or non-Saudi can attend or participate in external training and development courses such as conferences. However, there are conditions and requirements you have to meet them. The difference is that Saudi academic staff get financial support to attend or participate, and our Non-Saudis colleague usually do not get any financial support” (Saudi participant #5).

Foreign-born academic staff are recruited and required to produce research outputs that contribute toward the university goals, yet they receive limited or, in some instances, no financial support to engage in international academic learning forums such as conferences, workshops, and symposiums. They are, however, provided administrative approval to attend, while their Saudi counterparts are provided with financial assistance. The approval for academic staff goes through several stages, which starts with the Departmental Faculty Board and is followed by the College Faculty Board; the final approval decision is sought from the university Rector (i.e. the equivalent of Vice Chancellor in Western universities).

“The University President may, on the recommendation of the Departmental Faculty Board and then the College Faculty Board, allow a faculty member to attend a conference or symposium, without the university bearing any expense” (Article 27 of the Charter for Employment of Non-Saudi Staff).

In most cases, while the university provides financial support for flights, conference registration fees, and living allowances for Saudi academic staff, foreign-born faculty staff are generally granted approval without financial support.

“There are training courses conducted by the university throughout the year to train faculty members in various fields. However, the university only supports Saudi members who wish to participate in conferences and training courses, but there are conditions and criteria to be achieved by the faculty member. These procedures are too long which might cause missing that particular conference” (Foreign-born participant #20).

The differences in support are highlighted by a staff member who noted that:

“The university provides external training courses both in Saudi Arabia and abroad, but only certain people get this kind of training courses, and it is restricted to Saudis only. This implies poor planning and poor training strategies from the specialised authorities” (Foreign-born participant #3).

Additionally, although the application processes for participation in international training and development programs is the same for Saudi and foreign-born workers, the length of time to obtain approval varies between groups. Several foreign-born workers noted that their Saudi counterparts generally obtained approval within a short time but that their approval time was much longer. Foreign-born faculty members construe such differences in the approval processes as a sign of inequity or procedural injustice in administering HRD opportunities.

“I received an official invitation from the Capital Market Authority to attend a workshop. I then extended this invitation to the Head of Department and the Dean of the College to take the attendance approval and to facilitate all other procedures. Unfortunately, the length of the internal procedures inside the university prevents me to attend and participate at that training course because the decision is taken by the university” (Foreign-born participant #19).

“Regarding attending conferences, we pay all the expenses before. However, we have a very difficult time getting the approval from the university to go and take leave for these days that we take in the conference and the procedures related to non-Saudis might take longer time compared to Saudis” (Foreign-born participant #17).

A further complication in the waiting periods for training approval is the type of employment contracts of Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers. The latter are on fixed-term contracts while the former might have tenured employment contracts. As one foreign-born worker noted:

“Non-Saudi academic staff can’t get any financial support for attending international conferences, they only receive an approval to attend from the university. I think this is because that Saudi universities do not want to spend money or expenses for non-Saudi academic staff due to the

assumption that they are under contract and they might leave the university any time” (Saudi participant #10).

“We prefer to select Saudi academic staff for attending training and development courses. This does not mean we ignore our non-Saudi colleagues, but because Saudi academic staff are permanent and non-Saudi academic staff are under renewable contract and they will leave the university any time” (Saudi participant #8).

Despite the variation in the approval processes for HRD opportunities outside the university premises, participants perceived equity in access to internal HRD programs. They noted that the internally organised HRD programs generally involved basic short courses or seminars that are mostly proposed and organised by the deanship responsible for training and development. Attendance at such sessions requires a single-level approval, usually by the head of school.

“The university provides short and basic training and development programs or courses such as E-learning and other basic courses. However, these programs are not well designed and not based on our needs. Also, I noticed that there is no clear strategy for head of schools to select and nominate academic staff for attending these training and development programs. For example, one of my colleagues was nominated to attend a training course inside the university twice last year and there are other academic staff who have not been selected to attend this training program” (Foreign-born participant #20).

Further to the lack of procedural and administrative justice in the approval process, it was noted that many of the internal training and development activities were generally not based on the development needs of academic staff. In addition, these programs mostly did not address the research development needs of academic staff.

“There is a special section for training and development, but what is noticeable is that this section focuses on basic courses such as basics of computer and other basic courses. But for the internal and external courses that are related to scientific research, I think it is few and need to be reconsidered by the responsible authorities at the university” (Foreign-born participant #7).

4.5.2 Theme 2: Managerial discretion

In most Saudi Arabian universities, the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs (referred to as human resource services in Western universities) manages matters related to human resources. The deanship is expected to perform its functions in partnership with heads of departments and deans of colleges. For example, the various heads of department and deans of colleges evaluate academic staff performance and identify their training needs. The final reports of these activities are kept by the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs. Academic staff members are obviously selected for training programs by the Dean of Training and Development without reference to the performance evaluation reports generated by the various deans and heads of departments. The absence of coordination between the various units has led to managerial discretion being applied when selecting academic staff for training. This situation has consequently contributed to the preference for members of in-groups consisting of members of extended family and tribes (Mellahi & Wood, 2013). Thus managers and leaders protect and prioritise in-group members over out-group members – foreign-born workers. This orientation is entrenched in Saudi culture and management style (Harbi et al., 2017).

“There should be honesty in applying the principles of work quality. However, there are special considerations that distinguish between nationalities within the organisation's environment especially training and development policy. This policy must be changed as soon as possible so that this university in particular and higher education in the Kingdom, in general, promote their reputation among other universities in the world. The international universities do not differentiate between faculty members but treat them in an excellent manner without distinguish between, so that they achieve their goals in a timely manner and with high quality” (Foreign-born participant #4).

“Saudi universities are trying to have a clear and transparent system for their employees. However, maybe in a few cases, some academic staff might use their networking and connections to speed up their transactions” (Saudi participant #22).

The limited involvement of heads of schools in the selection process may have contributed to the use of managerial discretion by the deans in charge of

training and development. The deans may propose training programs that are not relevant for foreign-born academics, and exclude them from relevant and important career development programs. Several foreign-born academics were aggrieved that such internal development programs failed to increase their skills and knowledge.

In addition, foreign-born academic staff perceived that the management style of deans and heads of colleges openly prioritised the career advancement and welfare of Saudi academic staff over that of foreign-born workers, especially regarding exclusion from important career development programs outside the university. The participants thought this reflected some form of administrative injustice or inequity in HRD support to staff members, despite the same work expectations for both groups.

“I think the way how academic staff are selected for attending training and development courses is not fair. We are all undertaking equivalent responsibilities towards enhancing academic work. However, I feel administrative injustice in not nominating non-Saudi academic staff for attending training and development courses” (Foreign-born participant #9).

4.5.3 Theme 3: Limited HRD opportunities for foreign-born nationals

The evidence further points to preferential treatment for Saudi nationals over foreign-born workers in the distribution of HRD opportunities. Although HRD programs are generally designed to support employees regardless of their nationality, it was evident that foreign-born workers only had equal access to internal (in-house) training programs; external training and development opportunities were restricted to Saudi nationals. For example, HRD programs are regarded by foreign-born workers as relevant to improving their teaching and research skills, yet they cannot access them. According to Article 27 of the Charter for Employment of Foreign-Born Workers, “the University President may, on the recommendation of the Departmental Faculty Board and then the College Faculty Board, allow a faculty member to attend a conference or symposium, without the university bearing any expense” (*Statute Governing the Employment of Non-Saudis at Universities* 1996, p. 8). Though the law does not constitute discrimination,

it has created a conduit for deans and senior management staff to engage in perceived inequities against foreign-born workers.

“As for the support for conference attendance, it is restricted to only Saudi faculty members. For non-Saudis (contractors), there is a very big problem. This policy supporting Saudis and not non-Saudis contradicts to the nature of the work. When you hire someone to do a job, you must give them all the tools, facilities, and support needed to achieve the goals you need to achieve. But when you hire someone and do not give them some basic things, I expect that this does not help the organisation increase its efficiency and reputation among other organisations. Successful organisations provide all necessary tools to get the job done. This policy must be changed, which is the perception and distinction in the functional rights between Saudi and non-Saudi, because the two parties are striving to achieve one goal” (Foreign-born participant #17).

“Our university provides training and development programs internally or abroad. For internal training and development programs, Saudis and non-Saudis academic staff can attend after taking the approval from the authorised unit or person. However, external training and development courses are restricted for Saudi academic staff” (Saudi participant #24).

Although foreign-born academic staff represent a significant proportion of the workforce in the study sample (63% of the professoriate in Saudi universities comprises foreign-born workers) (Ministry of Education, 2019), their access to HRD opportunities was limited. One participant noted that, since assuming duty, he had participated in only one short training course. The course was organised within the university, whereas Saudi counterparts received assistance to attend international conferences and seminars on several occasions, despite having the same levels of work expectations.

“I have been working in this university for almost 8 years and prior that I was an assistant professor in another Saudi university. During my time there and here now, I realised that Saudi academic staff have more opportunities than non-Saudi nationals in benefiting from training and development courses abroad” (Saudi participant #6).

“Although we Non-Saudi academic staff form influential number in the KSA [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] higher education, we have limited opportunity in participating in the external training and development programs such as

international conferences and so on. We wish that the university change this policy and treat us fairly” (Foreign-born participant #12).

The work expectations of Saudi and foreign-born workers are equivalent; however, opportunities for training and career development are limited for foreign-born workers and mostly confined to internally based training. Many of the participants felt that the system bred inequality and differentiated between Saudi and foreign-born workers, despite employment contracts requiring all staff to contribute to the advancement of research and teaching and to support their respective institutions in achieving global recognition.

“As for conferences, there is no support for non-Saudi faculty members to attend and participate in conferences. The motivation that makes me publish research work is to get a promotion to associate professor” (Foreign-born participant #21).

Another participant added:

“For the training and development of this university, there are training programs held by the university, but I think that it needs more training courses that fit the needs of faculty members. For me, since I joined the university, I have only been able to attend one training course, and it was within the university” (Foreign-born participant #21).

4.6 Discussion and implications

Building staff capabilities in the higher education sector has a compounding effect and supports an initiative by Saudi Arabia in the Vision 2030 plan that seeks to address the sector’s human capital needs. This study was framed as an exploration in equity among Saudi national and foreign-born workers in a university setting through the lens of how HRD opportunities are administered. The notion of equity is interpreted as a positive link between the individual’s input and the returns the individual receives; individuals perceive inequity when they observe inequitable treatment in return for their efforts and other contributions (Robbins et al., 2012; Sprecher, 2018). The findings indicate procedural differences in selecting and approving staff requests for HRD support, managerial discretion in selecting participants for

HRD programs, and selective or restricted access to HRD programs for foreign-born employees.

The results demonstrate that, compared with their Saudi counterparts, foreign-born workers are not provided with equal HRD support and opportunities. The nature of the employment contracts of Saudi and foreign-born workers explicitly demonstrates forms of institutionalised inequality between the two cohorts. For example, while Saudi academic staff enjoy job security through tenured or permanent contracts, their foreign-born counterparts are offered temporary contracts with opportunities for renewal based on discretionary performance standards (Alkhazim, 2003). The evidence further points to Saudi universities focusing on career development of Saudi academic staff by facilitating and providing more HRD opportunities to Saudi nationals, particularly to attend conferences, workshops, and symposiums abroad. Arguably, investment in the national workforce builds a country's human capital (Ryan, 2016). However, the likely consequence of such perceived inequity is that it will influence foreign-born workers to reduce their work output by directly limiting their research output and the tendency to share knowledge or collaborate with Saudi nationals to pursue research (Brewer et al., 1990; Ramlall, 2004). The perceived inequity directly contradicts the underlying logic of employee motivation, which is based on the presence of a fair system for balancing employee input–output ratios (Tsui et al., 2018).

Saudi universities believe that HRD programs, especially those held overseas, should be given to Saudi academic staff because foreign-born workers are on renewable contracts that they can terminate at any time. Though this assumption may be reasonable, it generally undermines the universities' ability to build the required human capabilities, given that a majority of Saudi university academics are foreign-born. Indeed, the true benefits of HRD lie in improving the ability of Saudi universities to achieve global recognition by increasing the capabilities of individual academic staff, regardless of differences in nationality. Perceived inequity can influence the turnover intentions of foreign-born workers and potentially contribute to negative outcomes such as decreased work performance and increased withdrawal

behaviour (Tsui et al., 2018; Uen et al., 2016).

The organisational psychology literature has demonstrated that perceptions of organisational injustice are linked to stress, which contributes to psychological strain, decreased organisational commitment and decreased job performance (Ybema et al., 2016). Such effects on foreign-born workers may result from the perceived absence of procedural and administrative justice in supporting their career development. Further, how HRD opportunities are administered for Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers was similar in all the sample universities despite their different establishment dates and locations. Such similarity points to widespread inequity throughout the sample.

The inequity in the management of people in Saudi universities explicitly undermines the knowledge-sharing capabilities of foreign-born workers, which has long-term implications for building the institutional and human capacity of Saudi universities. Drawing from the literature on knowledge transfer, Cabrera and Cabrera (2005) argued that knowledge sharing among key employees represents an important component of the knowledge-flow mechanism driven by knowledge creation and integration. The psychological element of employee knowledge-sharing behaviour identifies HRM practices as an underpinning condition in facilitating knowledge sharing in organisations (Galizia & Bruder, 2016). The HRM practices that encourage knowledge sharing include HRD, work culture, work design, and performance appraisal (Donnelly, 2019). The perceived inequity noted in Saudi universities potentially contributes to foreign-born workers experiencing psychological strain. In turn, this strain may decrease their work commitment and consequently affect the government's commitment to building strong academic institutions for global recognition and developing the country's human capabilities (Sprecher, 2018).

Recruiting international staff has advantages such as talent availability for better university performance, filling skill gaps, increasing university diversity, networking opportunities, and improving local employee skills and capabilities through knowledge sharing with foreign-born academics (Galizia & Bruder, 2016). Yet the evidence suggests that Saudi universities have failed

to develop institutional structures and mechanisms to draw from the capabilities of foreign-born workers. The findings support providing equitable HRD opportunities for both Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers, while establishing structures to support knowledge sharing among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers (**Error! Reference source not found.**). This approach would address the perceived inequity and create avenues for increasing knowledge transfer.

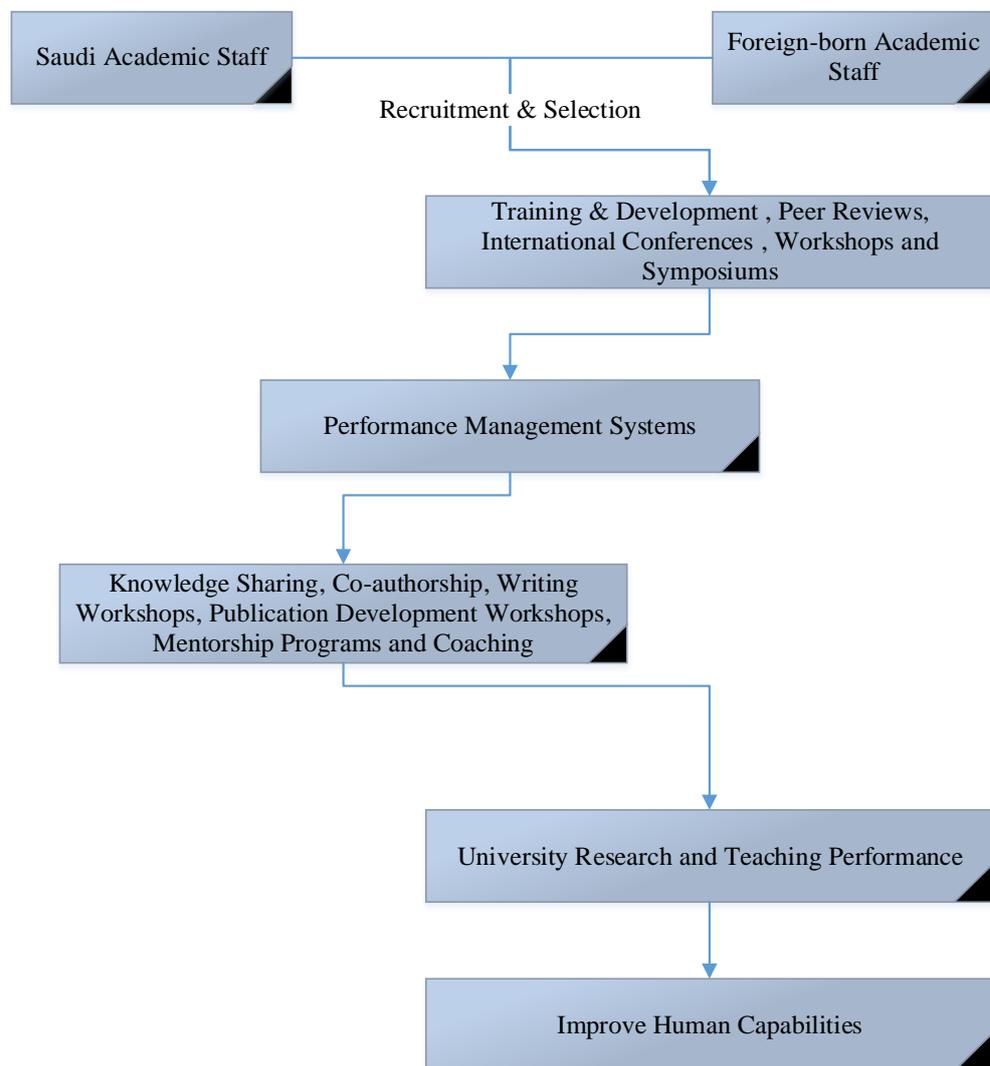


Figure 4-2 A proposed framework for knowledge sharing in Saudi higher education

HRD programs potentially improve the self-efficacy of academic staff and

correspond with Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy, which is built on modelling, coaching, and sharing of successful experiences, and leads to mastery. When foreign-born workers perceive equity in the provision of career development opportunities, they may feel more assured of their capabilities, likely resulting in their engaging in knowledge exchange (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Mahdi et al., 2019). Perceived equity in administering HRD programs increases employees' commitment and helps build strong collegiality by stimulating knowledge-sharing behaviours that are essential for the transfer of knowledge (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Minbaeva et al., 2009). In addition, given the projected benefits of knowledge transfer and integration, systems for both compensation and evaluating performance should be designed to nurture and encourage the knowledge-sharing behaviours of academic staff (Donnelly, 2019). Acknowledging and rewarding knowledge-sharing behaviours supports knowledge sharing and further signals to employees the desire of Saudi universities to deepen the sharing and application of knowledge (Mahdi et al., 2019). Practically, making knowledge-sharing behaviours a critical element of career success is a good way of inducing and sustaining such tendencies (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). The skills and capabilities required of foreign-born academics may also be captured through demonstrating collegiality in research and teaching within performance management systems. When collegiality in teaching and research performance behaviours is explicitly recognised and rewarded, this may become an essential component of the job requirements for foreign-born academics. This would create avenues to further promote knowledge sharing in Saudi universities. Importantly, recognising knowledge-sharing behaviours in performance evaluation is likely to lessen the perceived cost of including foreign-born academics in HRD programs and help to eliminate the perceived inequity.

The proposed knowledge-sharing framework should be built on a strong performance management system that supports and encourages knowledge sharing between the groups (Giauque et al., 2013; Sprecher, 2018). For example, any ambiguity in the performance management system will ultimately undermine the investment in HRD programs for foreign-born

academic staff. Equal access to HRD opportunities should correspond with knowledge-sharing practices such as research collaborations between Saudi and foreign-born nationals, writing workshops, publication development workshops, mentorship programs, and coaching sessions. These knowledge-sharing platforms ultimately assist in developing human capabilities and building the research capacity of universities. Encouraging knowledge sharing is necessary to improve the research outcomes of local academic staff, which in turn leads to improving the global performance of Saudi universities. The ability to manage knowledge sharing and build human capabilities is an important determinant of organisational success as these capabilities are critical resources for creating value and increasing the competitiveness of universities (Saheem et al., 2017).

4.7 Chapter summary and study limitations

In recognising the strategic vision of the Government of Saudi Arabia to develop human capabilities and build capacity in the higher education sector, this essay supports the view that HRD programs should be administered equitably to Saudi nationals and foreign-born university staff. The evidence of procedural differences, managerial discretion, and limited access to HRD for foreign-born nationals likely contributes to perceived inequity in people management. The consequences affect staff motivation and employee commitment and contribute to psychological strain. Foreign-born workers can increase diversity of work culture, remedy skill shortages, build collaboration and networking, and improve local skills and capabilities through knowledge sharing (Galizia & Bruder, 2016). Thus, providing equitable HRD opportunities and establishing structures that support knowledge sharing in order to tap the skills and capabilities of foreign-born academics will assist in developing human capabilities and building the research capacity of Saudi institutions.

Although this study has highlighted the nature of the current HRD system in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector, this research has limitations. First, the study examined only HRD practices; other management practices should be examined to explore how they work within the Saudi higher education sector. Second, the study examined only publicly funded universities. Primary research based on case studies provides limited opportunity for the findings to be generalised to other contexts; therefore, caution is required in interpreting the findings for other contexts.

Despite these limitations, the research highlights the need to develop equitable HRD programs to support both Saudi and foreign-born workers in building human capacity, in terms of both the Saudi Vision 2030 strategy and in the GCC countries, which rely heavily on foreign labour. On a practical level, the study proposes the equitable provision of HRD programs, followed by a well-structured mechanism for knowledge sharing. These adjustments should be delivered through alignment with a performance management system to ensure feasible benefits for Saudi universities. Because of the GCC countries' reliance on foreign labour, the study's implications for HRD may

extend to other contexts with similar dominance of foreign labour in the workforce. This is an important contribution of this study considering the aging populations and declining fertility rates in the GCC and other developed economies, which may force even greater reliance on and competition for foreign labour.

The next chapter (Chapter 5) discusses the third objective of the study (Essay 3).

Objective 3: To examine the link between HRM practices and university performance.

Submission journal: *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance.*

Title of paper: HRM practices and academic research output: Evidence from the Saudi higher education sector

CHAPTER 5. Essay 3. HRM Practices and Academic Research Output: Evidence from the Saudi higher education sector

5.1 Chapter outline

This chapter, which is Essay 3 comprises eight sections. An introduction of the study, the main research objective and an overview of Saudi Arabia are presented in Section 5.2. Section 5.3 describes different measures of academic research output. Theory and hypothesis development are explained in Section 5.4. Section 5.5 describes the research method of the study and explains the qualitative and quantitative data collection. Also, it presents the findings of the qualitative data. Section 5.6 outlines the analysis of the quantitative data and presents the results of analysis. The findings and their implications are discussed in Section 5.7. Finally, the limitations of the research and a summary of the findings are presented in Section 5.8.

5.2 Introduction

Although a well-established strand of literature exists on the link between human resource management (HRM) and organisational performance (Saridakis et al., 2017; Zhang & Morris, 2014), inconsistencies remain about the specific HRM practices linked to organisational performance (Guchait & Cho, 2010). Prior literature suggests many practices are important, including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, performance appraisal, internal career paths, job security, employee benefits schemes, grievance systems, information sharing and employee empowerment (Boselie, Dietz, & Boon, 2005). In other words, opinions differ and no standard list of HRM practices defines the link between HRM and performance. For example, Boselie et al. (2005) identified 26 HRM practices that have been applied in various studies. The four HRM practices most frequently applied were training and development, compensation, performance management, and recruitment and selection. These four practices correspond with the strategic HRM notion (Batt, 2002) in which HRM alignment with organisational strategy leads to improved performance (Chowhan, 2016).

Beyond the disagreement on specific HRM practices and performance dimensions, the literature on HRM linkage with organisational performance also examines various elements of performance: financial outcomes, operational performance, and employee attitudes and behaviours (Boselie et al., 2005). Financial outcomes encompass not only profitability and sales volume but also return on equity, market value or market share, return on assets, and revenue (Boselie et al., 2005). However, the most common performance outcomes measured to link with HRM practices are sales volume and profitability (Paauwe, 2009). HRM researchers raise concerns that using measures of financial performance such as profitability and sales volume is problematic. These outcomes are influenced by external and internal factors possibly outside the domain of employees and their capabilities (Paauwe, 2009). For operational performance, several dimensions may be significant, namely production or service quality, innovation, sales and productivity (Samson & Terziovski, 1999). In contrast, employee attitudes and behaviour

may be gauged through motivation, commitment, trust, staff turnover or turnover intentions, and absenteeism (Paauwe, 2009).

The private sector context (e.g. manufacturing, private service-based firms) typically dominates the literature on the link between HRM practices and organisational performance (Jaskiene, 2015). Research on the link between HRM and organisational performance in a university context, which represents large global private or public organisations, is absent in the evolving HRM literature. Although similar HRM dimensions may apply in measuring performance in different organisational contexts, the particularities of higher education institutions may influence measurement in this context. For example, in a typical university work context, employee performance is gauged through teaching, research and community engagement or community services. In this study, the choice of research as a measure of academic staff performance was driven by the largely subjective measures of teaching (measured mostly through student evaluation reports) and community engagement (measured via discretion of a supervisor or head of department). Research output is an objective way to measure academic staff performance. In addition, research output is a key measure for attaining global recognition and international rankings in the higher education sector, albeit teaching and engagement are relevant elements in some rankings (Altbach & Salmi, 2011). Therefore, identifying HRM-related factors that increase research output is vital for higher education institutions with global aspirations. Also, HRM practices presumably influence individual research performance, which contributes to university branding and global recognition.

Employees are an important source of organisational success, with the potential to increase an organisation's survival and competitiveness (Chowhan, 2016; Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016). The literature provides considerable evidence that demonstrates effective use of HRM practices both improves employees' knowledge and skills and directly links to positive employee and organisational outcomes such as increased productivity (Datta, Guthrie, & Wright, 2005) and organisational performance (O'Donohue & Torugsa, 2016). Today's higher education environment has become increasingly competitive. Many public and private universities have adopted

market-oriented models in order to attract, develop and retain talented faculty members, thereby remaining locally and internationally competitive (Amin et al., 2014; Bowra, Sharif, Saeed, & Niazi, 2012; Chen, Wang, & Yang, 2009). Within the university context, similar to other organisations, faculty members play a strategic role in improving institutional ratings, particularly research outcomes (Lew, 2008). Thus, implementing effective and appropriate HRM practices for university employees ultimately promotes university performance and contributes to society. Jöns and Hoyler (2013) argued that research outcomes is one of the main factors that supports universities' reputation in international rankings and their global branding.

Currently, Saudi Arabia has 28 publicly funded universities distributed across the Kingdom (Ministry of Education, 2019). Foreign nationals continue to dominate the workforce across sectors of the economy, with the education sector having the highest proportion of foreign-born employees. For instance, non-Saudi academic staff in 2016–2017 totalled 27,148 (Ministry of Education, 2019).

The government's efforts to reduce bureaucracy in education management led to the 2015 merger of the ministries of Education and Higher Education to oversee the education landscape (Ministry of Education, 2019). As part of decreasing the economy's dependence on oil, the government wants at least five publicly funded universities among the global top 200 universities by 2030 (Vision 2030 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2019). Through this global recognition, the government hopes Saudi universities will attract international students and research funding. Saudi universities are already developing and building their capacity and capabilities to become competitive in the global higher education market. Regional and international branding is an important strategic tool when competing in the global higher education market. The capacity for global research impact is particularly important in global education branding, which prioritises the quality of academic staff and government commitment to investment in higher education (Jöns & Hoyler, 2013). The government has demonstrated its commitment through progressive investment in education infrastructure and developing human capacity through the King Salman Program for Human Resource

Development. Within this context, this study examined the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output in the higher education sector in Saudi Arabia.

This research aims to explore the relationship between HRM practices and university performance. Specifically, the study examined academic research output in the setting of the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. This study contributes to the extant literature in several ways. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first study to examine the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output in an emerging country setting in the Middle East. Most of the studies that have examined the relationship between HRM practices and performance have used Western contexts. Non-Western contexts remain under-researched and policy implications for the higher education sectors in these contexts are questionable (Farouk, Elanain, Obeidat, & Nahyan, 2016; Guest, 2011). This study adds to the limited literature on the relationship between HRM practices, trust, knowledge sharing and academic research output, particularly in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Theoretically, this study contributes to understanding the relationship between HRM and employee performance in a higher education context.

5.3 Measuring academic research output: Closing the loop

No universally applied standard for measuring research output has been developed within the academic community, and standards vary among universities from the same country and different countries. Several studies have defined research output as the extent to which a faculty member is involved in research activities that result in publications in refereed journals, conference proceedings, books and book chapters, technical reports and working papers (Sahoo, Singh, Mishra, & Sankaran, 2017). Others consider research output also extends to faculty members' work with postgraduate students in dissertations, research grants, editorial work, the writing of monographs, the creation of experimental designs, creative or artistic works,

and public debates and commentaries (Okiki, 2013).

Measuring academic research performance differs among universities due to the multidimensional concept of academic research output. However, a common indicator of a faculty member's research output is the number of articles successfully published in peer-reviewed journals (Sahoo et al., 2017). Academic institutions are also judged through the number of articles published in recognised journals. Various organisations and institutions compile lists of the publications (e.g. Australian Business Deans Council & Research Excellence Rankings Analysis in Australia; Scimago Journal & Country Rank in the United States; Association of Business Schools in the UK). Although journal and university rankings based on various parameters are proliferating, research output measured through publications in journals remains a key determinant (Sahoo et al., 2017). For instance, the common measure for evaluating research productivity is either the reputation of an author or the quality of the journal (Mishra, 2014). An author's reputation is indicated by their total number of published papers (Hsieh & Chang, 2009), H-index (Liu, Lu, Lu, & Lin, 2013), and number of citations (Hsieh & Chang, 2009; Liu et al., 2013). A journal's quality is measured through its H-index (Liu et al., 2013), tiering, and impact factor (IF) (Ansari, Lockwood, & Modarress, 1992).

Quantifying published records has largely been used to measure faculty research performance. The existing literature commonly combines various quantifiable measures of research output, such as publications, grants, conference papers and presentations, into a single measure (Kim, Wendel, & Twombly, 2011). Ramsden (1994) argued that the number of publications is the most critical indicator for measuring research output based on the following reasoning: (a) publications are central to scholarly activity and recognition, (b) publications are regarded as the main source of esteem, (c) number of publications is an important factor in academic promotions, (d) publications provide strong evidence of institutional excellence, and (e) publications are important for obtaining competitive research funds. However, some researchers have argued that measuring research output should be based on the quality, not quantity, of publications. They suggest

that peer recognition, citation indices, weighted indices, grant awards, and fewer co-authors with higher authorship positions in publications all assist in assessing the quality of research productivity (Rebne, 1990; Townsend & Rosser, 2007).

On the contrary, Alli (2003) argued that measuring research productivity in a quantifiable way could spur faculties to falsely maximise the number of publications or increase the number of co-authorships. Such practices would compromise the quality and impact of research. Clearly, scholars disagree about the appropriate standards to measure research output; each method has strengths and limitations. Within the Saudi context, Alzuman (2015) examined which research-promoting practices in Saudi public universities affect faculty research performance. The author measured academic research output by counting the faculty members' research activities in seven domains: publications in refereed journals, publications in professional journals, published books, published book chapters, edited books, translated books, and conference papers.

5.4 Theory and hypothesis development

5.4.1 HRM practices and performance (research output)

Researchers have defined HRM in many ways, and various HRM models have been developed since the concept was introduced in the management literature. The HRM models were designed to link a company's organisational strategy to the main personnel operations such as employee selection, development, rewards and appraisals (Fong, Ooi, Tan, Lee, & Yee-Loong Chong, 2011). Effective HRM maximises firms' competitiveness (Way, Wright, Tracey, & Isnard, 2018). More nascent literature regards particular practices as vital for linking HRM and performance. These practices form what is called a high-performance work system. The high-performance work system corresponds with high commitment and high involvement. The system represents an alternative to hierarchical, mass-production forms of work organisation (Tomer, 2007; Tsai, 2006; Whitfield, 2000). The propagation of high-performance work systems supports the shift

from traditional and bureaucratic approaches to HRM to high-performance approaches (Tomer, 2007).

Several theories aim to link HRM practices at both individual and organisational levels with performance through their impact on employees' skills, abilities, knowledge and motivation (Guest, 2011; Paauwe, 2009). These theories include resource dependency, human capital, strategic HRM and the resource-based theory of the firm (Guest, 2011; P. Paauwe & Richardson, 1997). Two research strands dominate the literature on the relationship between HRM practices and performance (Tsai, 2006). The first strand studies the impact of individual HRM practices on performance; for example, training and development (see Tsai, 2006). The second strand tests the effect of complementary HRM practices on organisational outcomes (see Foss, Pedersen, Reinholt Fosgaard, & Stea, 2015; Tsai, 2006). Some scholars, including Foss et al. (2015) and Whitfield (2000), suggest that the complementarities or the synergy among HRM practices have a large positive effect on organisational performance.

The literature on strategic HRM proposes a link between the value of HRM and performance (Giauque et al., 2013; Ko & Smith, 2013). Davis (2017) argues HRM gives organisations competitiveness through using employees' capabilities and skills. HRM aims to increase individual wellbeing, productivity and overall organisational performance through improving employee outcomes, including job satisfaction (Albrecht, Bakker, Gruman, Macey, & Saks, 2015), minimising employee turnover and turnover intentions (Paauwe, 2009), higher productivity (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2017) and organisational citizenship behaviour (Ko & Smith, 2013).

Saridakis et al. (2017) and Veth, Korzilius, Van der Heijden, Emans, and De Lange (2017) found a positive and direct relationship between HRM and employee performance. Albrecht et al. (2015) also argued that an integrated approach to HRM practices increases employee satisfaction and commitment, which in turn leads to increased individual and organisational performance. Others found that effective staff recruitment and selection processes lead to organisational effectiveness (Ferris, Berkson, & Harris, 2002) and support organisations to become competitive, maintain their competitiveness and

increase performance (Pfeffer, 1995; Rehman, 2012). Millar and Stevens (2012) contended that training should increase employees' capabilities and thus contribute to improved overall organisational performance. They found a positive relationship between employee training and organisational performance. Additionally, the literature on performance management illustrates a positive link between effective performance appraisal systems and organisational performance (Ehrnrooth & Björkman, 2012). Osman, Ho, and Galang (2011) argued that ineffective performance appraisals in most organisations led to several undesirable issues, including low morale, decreased employee productivity, and low support or enthusiasm for the organisation, which in turn contributed to decreased organisational performance.

H1: HRM practices are significantly related to academic research output.

5.4.2 HRM practices, knowledge sharing and academic research output

The literature on HRM and knowledge sharing shows that effective HRM practices can foster knowledge sharing among employees in an organisation (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Cabrera, Collins, & Salgado, 2006). On the contrary, inappropriate HRM practices can hinder knowledge-sharing behaviour (Currie & Kerrin, 2003). Cabrera and Cabrera (2005) found that certain HRM practices such as training and development, recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, and reward and compensation influence knowledge sharing among employees.

Social exchange theory is defined as an exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly between at least two parties (Blau, 1964). Aselage and Eisenberger (2003) proposed three perspectives that share a common foundation in social exchange theory. First, exchanging valued socio-emotional resources is important to develop an exchange relationship between employees and an organisation. Second, communication by one person or party to another are valuable in exchange relations. Finally, procedural justice is considered a significant factor in the relationship between an organisation and high quality employees. Organisations that

adopt proper HRM practices can encourage and motivate employees to share their knowledge (Naeem et al., 2019). In social exchange theory, HR practices are significant and can strongly affect the relations between an organisation and its employees (Naeem et al., 2019).

The influence of HRM practices on knowledge-sharing behaviours is widely recognised in various organisational contexts; for example, in high-tech industry (Han, Chiang, & Chang, 2010; Liu & Liu, 2011), non-profit agencies in the USA (Flinchbaugh, Li, Luth, & Chadwick, 2016), manufacturing and service industries in Malaysia (Chiang, Han, & Chuang, 2011), the banking industry in the Netherlands (Slagter, 2009), and the higher education sector in Pakistan (Naeem, Mirza, Ayyub, & Lodhi, 2019). The main argument is that HRM practices significantly improve knowledge sharing among employees, which in turn improves service quality (Flinchbaugh et al., 2016), research and development processes (Liu & Liu, 2011), and employees' innovative behaviours (Slagter, 2009). Knowledge sharing among employees also supports the generation of new and innovative ideas, processes, products and services (Fong et al., 2011).

HRM practices may influence knowledge-sharing behaviours. For example, recruitment and selection processes in an organisation seek to attract the best candidate to match the person-organisation fit. This person-organisation fit occurs when the values and characteristics of candidates correspond with the organisational culture (Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991). In an organisation that values knowledge sharing, new recruits need to value this dominant culture to achieve the best fit.

Training and development is a sub-function of HRM that provides employees with opportunities to exchange information during formal and informal sessions (Ipe, 2003). Higher education institutions are places for creating knowledge and innovative ideas; providing training and development sessions allows staff to disseminate such knowledge and information. Training and development enhances the self-efficacy level among faculty members, which gives them a chance to share their lived experiences and potential research ideas with others during conferences, workshops, symposiums and meetings (Cabrera, 2005; Liu & Liu, 2011). Thus, training

and development not only helps faculty members to share their knowledge but also increases the interaction and interpersonal relationships between them, which ultimately has positive impacts on their knowledge sharing (Biswanath Dutta et al., 2015).

Many studies show the importance of compensation and reward systems in increasing knowledge sharing among employees (Zárraga & Bonache, 2003). Evidence suggests that effective compensation and reward systems induce employees to share knowledge (Ooi, Teh, & Yee-Loong Chong, 2009). In the context of higher education, universities are recognised as knowledge-based organisations and models of knowledge development (Mehadi et al., 2019). Research outcomes are an aim of academic staff members and universities and require collaboration and teamwork (Nygaard, 2017). Therefore, knowledge sharing among academic staff increases the capability of researchers and the quality of research outcomes. Arguably, therefore, HRM practices play a significant role in facilitating knowledge sharing among academic staff.

H2: HRM practices have an indirect effect on academic research output through knowledge sharing

5.4.3 HRM practices, trust, knowledge sharing and academic research output

The literature contains several conceptualisations of trust occasioned by its multidimensional and multilevel nature (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). For instance, McAllister (1995) defines trust as “the extent to which a person is confident in and willing to act on the basis of the words, actions, and decisions of another”. Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna (1985), however, define trust as “feelings of confidence and security in the caring responses of the partner and the strength of the relationship”. Trust helps to build confidence and willingness in a relationship. When someone is confident and willing, they are more likely to share knowledge with those they trust (Mooradian, Renzl, & Matzler, 2006). Knowledge sharing involves the exchange of information to assist others in related jobs (Dong, Bartol, Zhang, & Li, 2017). Higher education institutions are perceived as reservoirs of knowledge through their production and creation of knowledge via research activities (Sohail & Daud,

2009). A lack of trust among co-workers may encourage individuals to hoard their knowledge (Dong et al., 2017).

HRM practices are an essential component for maintaining trust through promoting regular interaction and interpersonal relationships among employees within an organisation (Vanhala & Ahteela, 2011). The indispensable role of HRM practices in maintaining trust results from organisations making decisions in relation to HRM practices such as salary increments, promotions and career development (Aladwan, Bhanugopan, & D'Netto, 2015). These HRM decisions, whether fair or unfair, directly influence employees' behaviours and attitudes, particularly their commitment, trust and knowledge-sharing behaviours (Aladwan et al., 2015; Vanhala & Ahteela, 2011). Therefore, organisations that frequently make HRM decisions perceived as fair by employees can induce employee trust and knowledge-sharing intentions. Organisational trust stimulates interaction and interpersonal relationships among employees, which in turn eliminate barriers to information sharing among employees within the organisation (Lewicka & Krot, 2015; Vanhala & Ahteela, 2011). Therefore, HRM practices greatly affect trust, which in turn stimulates interpersonal relationships and knowledge-sharing behaviours.

Knowledge is recognised as one of the most strategically significant resources that organisations own (Melton, Chen, & Lin, 2006). Davenport and Prusak (1998) stated that knowledge assets are important due to their intangibility and the difficulty of imitating or replicating them. Knowledge assets are considered a source of long-term sustainable competitiveness (Mahdi et al., 2019). In the context of higher education, universities are seen as knowledge-based organisations and models of knowledge development (Mahdi et al., 2019). For instance, research is the primary area for the creation and dissemination of knowledge (Mansor et al., 2015). Research activities are an aspiration of academic staff members and universities, and typically require teamwork and collaboration. Among academic staff, knowledge sharing increases the capability and quality of research outcomes. A culture exists of senior academic staff sharing their experience, expertise and knowledge with junior academics to improve learning, teaching and research (Fauzi, Nya-

Ling, Thursamy, & Ojo, 2019). Within the university context, affect-based trust underpins knowledge sharing (Goh & Sandhu, 2013). Several studies have examined the linkage between trust and attitude toward knowledge sharing (e.g. Goh & Sandhu, 2013; Kim & Ko, 2014). Trust increases collegiality, which in turn supports knowledge sharing.

H3: There is a positive relationship between trust in peers and knowledge sharing.

H4: Trust in peers and knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output.

5.5 Research methodology

This section starts by establishing the specific paradigmatic approach for the study. Next, the selected research approach is discussed. This study used an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. The qualitative procedures are then explained, followed by a discussion of the quantitative approaches used.

5.5.1 Research paradigm

Chapter 3 explained five research philosophies, namely positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism. Based on an assessment of these five research philosophies, this study adopted the pragmatist research paradigm in order to examine the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output. This particular philosophy was chosen after carefully evaluating the ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology suggested by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004). This study shows ontologically that reality is what is extracted from the investigation. In other words, the essence of reality is not universally true; rather it is based on the practical consequences of ideas. Epistemologically, the information obtained from this study is relevant to the study context. Also, the results were true because the data were obtained from the participants in the study context. Methodologically, this study used a mixed methods research design which is consistent with pragmatism. Finally, axiologically, this study started with a problem and provided practical solutions that generate future practice, which

is also consistent with pragmatism. In the current study, the research is extrinsic to the investigation process as participants were provided sufficient information about the research in order to gain their consent to participate. The study used a random sampling technique, and equal access during the investigation process was given to all participants. Having carefully reviewed all five paradigms, it can be accepted that pragmatism is the most suitable research paradigm to solve the research questions of the current study.

5.5.2 Research method

This study used a mixed methods research design underpinned by the pragmatist research paradigm. The design supports the application of both qualitative and quantitative strands in examining the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. Mixed methods research is defined as research in which a group of researchers or individuals combine components of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (e.g. quantitative and qualitative viewpoints, data collection, data analysis, and inference techniques) to achieve breadth and depth of understanding, and for corroboration (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Mixed methods research is one of the common noteworthy methodological approaches taken within the social science research arena in the past few years (Brannen, 2017). In the field of business studies, Hurmerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela (2006) illustrated that mixed methods research adds value to the research by increasing the validity of the findings, by informing the collection of the second data source, and by supporting the generation of new knowledge. A mixed methods approach enables a researcher to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative approaches (Morse, 2016). The selection of this approach allows both the respondents and the researcher to explain their views of reality and the researcher to interpret the responses of the participants.

This study adopted the exploratory sequential design of mixed methods. Exploratory sequential design is a two-phase design in which the qualitative data is collected first, followed by the quantitative data collection. In other words, one type of data provides the basis for collecting another type of data (Guetterman, Fetters, & Creswell, 2015). In this study with exploratory

sequential design (qual → QUAN), qualitative semi-structured interviews followed by quantitative data collection through an online survey (Qualtrics online software, www.qualtrics.com) were used. The qualitative methods are employed to focus on contextualising and exploring the HRM practices in detail, including issues around trust in peers, knowledge sharing, and academic research output. The quantitative methods are employed to test the research hypotheses. The findings from the qualitative phase provided the basis for developing a standardised survey questionnaire to collect the quantitative data.

The first phase of this study began by using qualitative methods through semi-structured interviews. Interviews enable respondents to express their views freely, which offers reliable, comparable information (Turner & Daniel, 2010). In this phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR managers, deans, head of departments and academic staff from different levels in the selected universities. The second phase, the quantitative online survey, was employed to test the research hypotheses. An online survey offers both the researcher and participants benefits because it is fast, cheap and easy to use. Additionally, online surveys are easy to design and are flexible (Hingaspure & Patil, 2019; Whitford & Warren, 2019; Wright, 2005).

5.5.3 Qualitative phase

The qualitative field study is described below.

5.5.3.1 Designing an interview schedule

The interview questions were categorised in two sections, demographic questions and questions about HRM practices. The demographic questions gathered information on the participant's position, age, qualifications, nationality, years in the current job, and years of experience in higher education. The questions relating to HRM practices focused on contextualising and exploring the HRM practices in detail, including issues around trust in peers, knowledge sharing, and academic research output. The qualitative phase helped to confirm the contextual appropriateness of the dimensions identified in the literature. As this study was conducted in public universities in Saudi Arabia and management studies are lacking in Saudi

Arabia in particular and in the GCC countries in general (Moideenkutty et al., 2011; Saheem et al., 2017), in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to probe for detailed explanations and information by allowing interviewees to express their opinions and views. The interviewer also created opportunities for clarification (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003).

5.5.3.2 Sample selection

The study was conducted in publicly funded universities in Saudi Arabia. This phase collected data from six universities with various establishment dates and geographical locations. These universities were purposively selected by applying two criteria. The first criterion involved dividing the growth of higher education in Saudi Arabia into three phases: the foundation, expansion and comprehensive phases. The foundation phase occurred between 1949 and 1960 with the establishment of four colleges, followed by one university. The expansion phase extended from 1961 to 1981. In the comprehensive phase, which began in 1982, higher education spread throughout the Kingdom, and many universities were established (Ismail et al., 2016). The researcher carefully ensured that the sample for this phase was representative. One university was selected from the foundation phase, two universities were selected from the expansion phase, and three from the comprehensive phase. The second criterion was willingness to participate in the study (Mansour et al., 2019)

Twenty-eight (28) participants were involved in this phase, including academic staff, heads of colleges and departments, and staff of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs (equivalent to HR departments in Western universities). Snowball sampling was used to recruit the participants for this phase. In snowball sampling, the research participants can recommend or recruit other participants to take part in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Table 5-1 presents the demographic profile of the participants. The data were collected using face-to-face interviews.

Table 5-1 Demographic profile of participants

University designation	Description	Key informants	Number of interviews
A	From the foundation phase	HR manager: 1 Deans & Heads of School: 2 Lecturers: 2	5
B	From the expansion phase	HR manager: 1 Deans & Heads of School: 3 Lecturers: 2	6
C	From the expansion phase	HR manager: 1 Deans & Heads of School: 2 Lecturers: 2	5
D	From the comprehensive phase	HR manager: 1 Deans & Heads of School: 1 Lecturers: 2	4
E	From the comprehensive phase	HR manager: 1 Deans & Heads of School: 1 Lecturers: 2	4
F	From the comprehensive phase	HR manager: 1 Deans & Heads of School: 1 Lecturers: 2	4
Total			28

5.5.3.3 Conducting the interviews and data collection

The semi-structured interviews of this study were obtained from 28 participants. At the time, the participants in the study occupied a variety of positions in the six selected public universities in Saudi Arabia. The researcher was satisfied that the 28 semi-structured interviews were sufficient, as data redundancy was ensured at this point (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Liu et al., 2019; Saunders & Townsend, 2016). The researcher actually arrived at data saturation at the 26th interview. However, two more interviews were conducted in order to confirm the saturation of the data; no new information emerged from the extra interviews. Hence, the number of interviews conducted in this study was considered sufficient; in qualitative

study, there is no consensus among scholars about the minimum number of interviews required (sample size), and the matter remains controversial (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2007; Deniz & Zhu, 2015). Moreover, some literature suggests that for research using interview techniques the minimum acceptable sample size is 12 (Collins et al., 2007; G. Guest et al., 2006). Large samples are most often linked to quantitative analysis and small samples to qualitative study (Collins et al., 2007).

The participants were given a number of interview tools, including an explanation of the study objectives, to help them develop their understanding before the in-depth interview. The interview questions were prepared in Arabic and English and then submitted to the ethics committee at Curtin University by the researcher for ethical approval. Prior to conducting each interview, a suitable place and time were arranged between the researcher and the participant. At the beginning of the interviews, participants were asked to give their consent to participate in the interview process. The formal interviews were conducted after gaining this voluntary consent from the participants. All the interviews were recorded using an audio-recording device.

The language of the interview was chosen according to the preference of each participant. The main language for communication at Saudi universities is Arabic; however, some universities use English as a delivery medium. Overall, 20 face-to-face interviews were conducted in Arabic and 8 were conducted in English. The interviews conducted in Arabic were transcribed and further translated into English. To ensure reliability, a third reviewer independently checked the translation process (Brislin, 1980). Also, respondent validation was used to increase the credibility of the study. Ten transcripts were emailed to interviewees for comment, verification and feedback to ensure that there was no loss of meaning from the interview (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017). The interviews lasted between 65 and 70 minutes.

The interviewer asked participants questions to explore HRM practices, trust in peers, and knowledge sharing, and to discover how they perceived these factors as affecting research output. Prior studies that examined the

relationship between HRM practices and performance had mainly canvassed the views of HR managers, thereby excluding the views of employees (e.g. Makhecha, Srinivasan, Prabhu, & Mukherji, 2018; Woodrow & Guest, 2014). To broaden the scope, the researcher interviewed academic staff, because employees' perceptions of implemented HR practices tend to differ from HR managers' perceptions of HR (intended HR practices) (Khilji & Wang, 2006). Also, HR managers, line managers and other employees at various organisational levels might perceive or experience the goals of HR practices differently (Khilji & Wang, 2006). Therefore, this phase included participants from different levels: academic staff, heads of colleges and departments, and staff in the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs.

5.5.3.4 Qualitative data analysis

The researcher carefully listened to each of interviews and wrote participant responses down in the respondents' own language to ensure that there was no loss of any theme or meaning of the interview (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). For data analysis, the 28 interviews were transcribed into English. Nvivo™ software is considered a standard program for the management of qualitative data (Roman et al., 2017) and was used in this process.

The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded and categorised to identify key themes and subthemes. The transcripts were doubled-checked and translated into English. The extracted dimensions were then matched to the literature to ensure content validity of the measurement instrument. The content analysis method was used to analyse the interview transcripts. Content analysis can determine key variables, factors and links in exploratory research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Inductive logical thinking skills were used to extract and categorise the data and constructs. The inductive process comprised conducting, transcribing, and analysing the interview transcripts (

Table 5-2 and Table 5-3). For concision, the details of the qualitative findings are presented in Appendix A.

Table 5-2 Dimensions and variables supported by the field study

Factor	Interview														Percent	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
Recruitment and selection (T & S)	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X			100
Training and development (T & D)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X		
Reward and compensation (R & C)		X	X	X		X	X	X			X	X		X		
Performance management (PM)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X		
Knowledge sharing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		
Trust in peers		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		
Academic research output	X	X	X					X	X	X		X	X	X		
Factor	Interview														Percent	
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28		
Recruitment and selection (T & S)	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		82.00
Training and development (T & D)		X	X		X	X	X		X	X			X	X		75.00
Reward and compensation (R & C)	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X		X		67.00
Performance management (PM)	X	X		X		X		X	X	X	X		X	X		75.00
Knowledge sharing		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		89.28
Trust in peers	X	x	X		X		X		X	X	x	X	x			75.00
Academic research output	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		78.57

X symbol indicates the field study participant's response in corresponding factors/items.

Table 5-3 Causal linkages among the dimensions explored in the qualitative analysis

Factor	Interview														Percent Continued
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
HRM practices to AR output	x		x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	100
HRM practices to KS to AR output	x	x	x		x		x		x	x	x			x	
Trust in peers to KS	x	x		x		x		x					x		
HRM practices to Trust in peers to KS to AR output	x	x		x	x			x	x	x	x		x	x	
Factor	Interview														Percent
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
HRM practices to AR output	x		x	x		x		x	x		x		x	x	67.85
HRM practices to KS to AR output			x	x		x			x	x		x		x	57
Trust in peers to KS	x	x			x	x	x			x	x		x		50
HRM practices to Trust in peers to KS to AR output		x		x	x			x	x			x		x	60

X symbol indicates the field study participant's response in corresponding links. AR = Academic Research; KS = Knowledge sharing.

5.5.4 Quantitative phase

To develop an instrument for measuring the linkage between HRM practices and academic research output in the context of Saudi higher education, the researcher began by exploring factors outlined in prior literature and the findings of the qualitative phase. The aim of the field study was to confirm existing variables and discover new variables (if any) that matched the prior literature. The quantitative phase of the research sought to validate the important factors that emerged from the analytic processes as well as the links between factors. The following sections describe the process of the qualitative field study.

5.5.4.1 Questionnaire development

The quantitative data collection was conducted through an online survey using Qualtrics online software (www.qualtrics.com). An online survey was appropriate and accessible to participants (Hingaspure & Patil, 2019; Whitford & Warren, 2019; Wright, 2005). The survey included four sections: demographic questions and questions about HRM practices, academic perception of research output, and academic research output. The study used a five-point Likert scale to measure all the variables in sections 2 and 3 of the survey, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*. Section 2 concerned HRM practices and Section 3 examined the academics' perceptions of research output. Likert scales are a method commonly used for quantitative data collection. They are considered suitable because they give participants options for their responses (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015). In most studies that examine the relationships between factors and variables with structural equation modelling (SEM), the Likert scale has been used widely used (Mourad & Florence, 2016). In Section One, the scale included demographic questions such as institution name, gender, nationality, academic status, academic position, age, years of experience, and discipline. Section Four measured academic research output, where 1 = *no publication* and 5 = *more than six publications*.

5.5.4.2 Questionnaire pre-testing

Twelve academic experts pretested the questionnaire before the final survey was distributed. Scholars differ on the satisfactory sample size for pretesting questionnaires; however, Hunt, Sparkman, and Wilcox (1982) suggested 12 people for pretesting. The 12 participants in this case were chosen randomly and contacted via email by the researcher, who asked them to pre-test the questionnaire for any difficulties in understanding any items. The 12 participants comprised 2 doctoral students, 3 assistant professors, 4 associate professors and 3 professors. Most of the feedback received was about the words and phrases used in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was amended based on the feedback.

5.5.4.3 Pilot study

The questionnaire was refined for the final version after receiving the comments and feedback from the pretesting process. The questionnaire was piloted to reduce ambiguity and check if there were unclear concepts or phrases that might affect the respondents' ability to answer questions. Also, it was piloted to test the applicability of the questionnaire to an appropriate number from the study sample size. In the pilot study, respondents were selected from the Saudi higher education sectors. The respondents were primarily approached via email and telephoned by the researcher, who informed them of the objectives of the research. A total of 50 usable and completed responses were accepted from the respondents in the pilot study. In the pilot survey, respondents were asked to comment on the uncertainty or difficulty of the questionnaire. The respondents made some comments, especially about the use of words, the overall structure of the questionnaire, and a few technical issues with the online survey. After the pilot study, some questions were modified based on the results of the internal consistency reliability test (Litwin, 1995). The data collected were analysed to check the questionnaire's validity. The findings of the review of the pilot study helped to refine the final survey. **Error! Reference source not found.** explains the statistic results of the pilot study.

Table 5-4 Descriptive statistics of pilot study data

Constructs	Items	Mean	SD	Constructs	Items	Mean	SD
Recruitment and Selection (R&S)	S2A_1	2.76	1.188	Knowledge Sharing(KS)	S3A_1	3.52	.995
	S2A_2	3.04	.903		S3A_2	3.34	.961
	S2A_3	3.48	1.035		S3A_3	3.70	.814
	S2A_4	3.40	1.010	Trust	S3B_1	3.46	.952
	S2A_5	3.18	1.119		S3B_2	3.50	1.015
	S2A_6	2.88	.982		S3B_3	3.42	.859
Training and Development (T&D)	S2B_1	2.88	1.272	S3B_4	3.30	.974	
	S2B_2	2.86	1.107	S3B_5	3.08	1.04	
	S2B_3	2.74	1.107	Academic Research Productivity (ARO)	S4_1	2.38	1.576
	S2B_4	2.80	1.161		S4_2	1.92	1.383
Reward and Compensation (R & C)	S2C_1	3.04	1.124		S4_3	1.80	1.088
	S2C_2	2.86	1.161		S4_4	1.18	.388
	S2C_3	3.26	1.192		S4_5	1.10	.303
	S2C_4	3.14	1.030	S4_6	1.240	.5911	
	S2C_5	2.88	1.172	Valid N= 50 (list wise)			
	S2C_6	2.68	.975				
Performance Management (PM)	S2D_1	2.76	1.041				
	S2D_2	2.64	1.052				
	S2D_3	2.88	.895				
	S2D_4	2.86	1.030				
	S2D_5	2.78	.932				

Source: Pilot study

5.5.4.4 Study population and sampling method

The sample used in this research was drawn from all 28 publicly funded universities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The reason for choosing only publicly funded universities was to concentrate on a single sector of higher education. The universities in this sector share the same highly competitive environment and are seeking a good reputation among universities worldwide. Becker and Gerhart (1996) indicated that research spanning various industries may be confounded because the sectors may have different competitive environments. Therefore, publicly funded universities were

selected as the sector from which to draw the sample. The quantitative phase aimed to examine the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output. The target population can be defined as all academic staff working in the 28 publicly funded universities.

In the Saudi Arabian higher education sector, academic staff can be categorised into five academic levels: professor, associate professor, assistant professor, lecturer and demonstrator. This study targeted academic staff in a variety of academic positions: Deans of Academic and Personnel Affairs (HR managers), deans of colleges, vice deans, heads of departments or units, and faculty members with no administrative role. To gather an appropriate sample for this study, purposeful random sampling was used. A total of 714 survey responses was collected, of which 50 were used for the pilot study. Usable samples for SEM analysis totalled 567 and 97 responses were unusable. The quantitative data collection took approximately 4 months.

5.5.4.5 Sample size determination

The current study utilised AMOS-based structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques (part of SPSS™) to test the hypotheses of the model. SEM has been widely used by researchers because it is flexible and allows examination of complicated associations and use of different types of data such as categorical, dimensional and censored data and count variables. In addition, comparisons across alternative modules can be undertaken (Xiong, Skitmore, & Xia, 2015). In SEM, there are no generalised guidelines regarding sample size requirements. However, Bagozzi and Yi (2012) have suggested that a minimum sample size of 200 is appropriate; fewer samples might lead to inaccurate results. This study used a total of 567 samples for the final analysis, which met the minimum sample size requirement of Bagozzi and Yi (2012).

5.5.4.6 Quantitative data collection

Before setting up the online survey, the researcher contacted the 28 universities for consent to contact academic staff via emails. With approval, the online survey was set up, after which all academic staff were notified with the help of the university IT managers. The response rate was considered insufficient, which led the researcher to discuss with the research supervisors an alternative survey distribution to elicit a higher response rate. The

researcher subsequently contacted key persons such as deans, vice-deans and heads of department to assist in distributing emails to encourage academic staff to participate. Also, to make it easy to use, the researcher designed the survey so that it could be sent by phone and accessed via WhatsApp™.

Using the above process, after one month the response rate had increased somewhat, which encouraged the researcher to continue with the technique of contacting key persons for another month. Further responses were elicited through emails, telephone calls, Research Gate™  and LinkedIn™ . The quantitative data collection took approximately four months, with 714 respondents. The usable responses (567) represented a response rate of 79.4%.

5.5.4.7 Measurement

5.5.4.7.1 Instrument selection

To produce an item pool for each factor in the model, items were extracted from prior literature. The researcher, who is proficient in both Arabic and English, aligned the field study analysis with current scales to match factor definitions (see MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011).

There were reasons for not using secondary data, which may avoid falsification. First, there is no available and accessible information in Saudi universities showing the number of research outcomes produced by academic staff. Some of this information is shrouded in secrecy among academic staff. Second, academic staff profiles on the various universities' websites are not regularly updated, making it challenging to determine the number of academic research publications using these profiles.

5.5.4.7.2 Dependent variable

The dependent variable used was academic research output, which was measured by six items adopted from (Alzuman, 2015). Participants were asked to indicate the number of research publications they had produced within the past 5 years in their present universities. The answer was recorded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*no publications within the past 5 years*) to above 6 (*more than 6 publications*).

5.5.4.7.3 Independent variables

HRM practices were considered across four dimensions: recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation, and performance management. They were measured by 21 items. For each specific HRM practice, participants were asked to assess the effectiveness of the HRM practice in their universities on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The items in the research instrument were derived and modified from prior literature (Fong et al., 2011; Tsai, 2006).

Knowledge sharing was measured by three items. These three questions were modified from the approach of Bartol and Srivastava (2002) and Becerra and Sabherwal (2001). A 5-point Likert scale assessed the items (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Trust in peers was measured by three items. These questions were adopted and modified from Cook and Wall (1980). A 5-point Likert scale assessed the items (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Appendix B lists all variables and their measuring items.

5.5.4.8 Control variables

This study included eight control variables: institution name, gender, nationality, academic status, academic position, age, years of work experience, and academic discipline. The institution name is coded from 1 to 28 because the 28 public universities in Saudi Arabia all participated in the quantitative phase of the study. The gender variable is coded 1 when a respondent is a male and 0 for a female. Nationality is represented by 1 when the respondent is Saudi and 2 when non-Saudi. Academic status is represented by 1 when the respondent is a professor, 2 for associate professor, 3 for assistant professor, 4 for lecturer and 5 for demonstrator. Academic positions are represented by 1 when the respondent is a Dean of Academic and Personnel Affairs, 2 when dean of a college, 3 for a vice dean, 4 for a head of department or unit, 5 for faculty members, and 6 for others (lecturers, teacher assistants, instructors and research assistants). Age is represented by an ordinal-level measure, where 1 = 30 and under, 2 = 31 to 40, 3 = 41 to 50, 4 = 51 to 60, and 5 = 61 and above. Years of experience is represented by 1 when the respondent's experience is less than 5 years, 2 when experience is 5 to 10 years, 3 when the experience is 11 to 15 years, 4 when experience is

16 to 20 years, 5 when experience is 21 to 25 years, 6 when the experience is more than 26 years. Finally, discipline was coded from 1 to 16. The demographic profile of participants is shown in Table 5-5. Just over half of the respondents were male (55.6%), with the largest age group 41–50 years (49.6%). Non-Saudi participants represented 52.9% of the total sample, which supports the earlier observation that the proportion of non-Saudi academic staff in Saudi higher education is higher than that of Saudi nationals (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Table 5-5 Profile of participants

Socio-demographic profile	Classification	Number (Frequency)	Percentage
Institution Name	1	22	3.9
	2	19	3.4
	3	22	3.9
	4	17	3.0
	5	21	3.7
	6	27	4.8
	7	16	2.8
	8	54	9.5
	9	19	3.4
	10	19	3.4
	11	16	2.8
	12	24	4.2
	13	28	4.9
	14	20	3.5
	15	16	2.8
	16	19	3.4
	17	22	3.9
	18	14	2.5
	19	14	2.5
	20	11	1.9
	21	17	3.0
	22	19	3.4
	23	20	3.5
	24	16	2.8
	25	19	3.4
	26	31	5.5
	27	14	2.5
	28	11	1.9
	Total	567	100
Gender	Male	315	55.6
	Female	252	44.4
	Total	567	100.0
Nationality	Saudi	267	47.8
	Non-Saudi	300	52.9
	Total	567	100.0
Academic Status	Professor	99	17.5
	Associate Professor	111	19.6
	Assistant Professor	226	39.9
	Lecturer	103	18.2
	Demonstrator	28	4.9
	Total	567	100.0

Socio-demographic profile	Classification	Number (Frequency)	Percentage
Academic Position	Dean of College	9	1.6
	Vice Dean	68	12.0
	Head of department/unit	45	7.9
	Faculty member (no administrative role)	68	12.0
	Faculty member (no administrative duties)	377	66.5
	Total	567	100.0
Age (years)	Under 30	58	10.2
	31–40	192	33.9
	41–50	281	49.6
	51–60	30	5.3
	61 and over	6	1.1
	Total	567	100.0
Experience (years)	Less than 5	119	21.0
	5–10	222	39.2
	11–15	129	22.8
	16–20	58	10.2
	21–25	17	3.0
	More than 26	22	3.9
	Total	567	100.0
Academic Discipline	1	25	4.4
	2	142	25.0
	3	64	11.3
	4	37	6.5
	5	28	4.9
	6	48	8.5
	7	21	3.7
	8	41	7.2
	9	14	2.5
	10	34	6.0
	11	27	4.8
	12	58	10.2
	13	8	1.4
	14	18	3.2
	15	2	.4
	16	25	4.4
Total	567	100.0	

5.5.4.9 Addressing common method bias

In social and behavioural sciences, common method bias is a serious problem. It is one of the main sources of measurement errors, which may influence the validity of empirical findings (Richardson, Simmering, & Sturman, 2009). Common method bias occurs when the same method is used to measure

correlations between variables (Schwarz, Schwarz, & Rizzuto, 2008). Self-report surveys are the common form of data collection in social sciences in the HRM field (Malhotra, Kim, & Patil, 2006). In this study, common method bias was a challenge; however, from the beginning of the study the researcher was conscious of minimising common method bias.

In this research, a number of procedures suggested in the literature (MacKenzie et al., 2011; Reio, 2010) were followed to minimise the likelihood of common method bias. The first was ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the study. Second, the scale items were designed to be clear and precise. For example, complicated wording and double-barrelled questions were avoided. Third, the survey was designed in English but was translated into the first language of Saudi universities, which is Arabic. This ensured that participants could complete the survey in their preferred language. Fourth, the participants were told that no particular response was favoured; rather, their honest evaluation of the items was desired. Fifth, the participants were given clear instructions to complete the survey to avoid confusion. Sixth, data were collected from academic staff in various positions such as dean, vice dean, head of units and departments, academic staff with no administrative duties, and academic staff in different positions in the university. Also, the participants were of different ages, levels of experience, and academic status (professor, associate professor, assistant professor and lecturer). Therefore, the data were collected from a range of participants with different characteristics and positions within the universities.

The literature proposes several analytical techniques to control common method bias, such as the Harman single factor (Harman, 1960), a common latent factor (Richardson et al., 2009), and a common marker variable (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). In this study, Harman's single factor controlled the common method bias. This technique uses exploratory factor analysis, in which all variables are loaded onto one factor. Also, these variables are constrained; therefore, there is no rotation. If the new factor exceeds 50% of the variance, then common method bias may be present. In this study, the new variable was 21.50%, indicating no common method bias.

5.6 Analysis and results

The data analysis included three steps. First, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) extracted the study's constructs. Second, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) tested the measurement model for the study's constructs and determined if the dimensions extracted through EFA analysis showed a good fit to the data. Third, a structural equation modelling (SEM) procedure analysed the relationships among the study's constructs as hypothesised.

5.6.1 Reliability and validity of measures

EFA with a principal component analysis (PCA) with a promax rotation with kappa equal to 4 was carried out to determine whether the number of factors (dimensions) and the loading of measure items on them conformed to what was expected on the basis of the proposed model. The total variance explained for the overall model with 35 items was 63.95% (Table 5-6), which indicates an acceptable construct validity. This initial stage was followed by calculating the reliabilities of the scale items to determine the degree to which the scales of the study are free from errors and are internally consistent.

Table 5-6 Percentage of variance, Cronbach's alpha and component loading range

Dimension	No. cases	No. items	No. removed items	% variance	Cronbach's alpha	Component loading ranges
HRM practices	767	21	0	52.527	.914	.345 to .762
Knowledge sharing	767	3	0	4.686	.694	.453 to .614
Trust	767	5	0	3.440	.831	.475 to .717
Academic research output	767	6	0	3.303	.785	.515 to .649
Overall	767	35	0	63.956	.910	.447 to .685

HRM = Human resource management; KMO measure of sampling adequacy = 0.890; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 10595.530; $P < .000$.

The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for data consistency in scales ranged between .694 (knowledge sharing) and .914 (HRM practices). The overall estimate of internal consistency of the scale was .910 for the whole

model (35 items), which is a satisfactory level of internal consistency (Table 5-6) (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011). Table 5-7 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the constructs of the model. Table 5-8 shows the results for composite reliability (CR), convergent validity (CV) by using the average variance extracted (AVE) criterion, maximum shared variance (MSV), average shared variance (ASV) and discriminant validity (DV). The reliability of the construct is met because all composite reliability coefficients are >0.7. Also, the AVE is satisfied because all AVEs are >0.5. Moreover, discriminant validity is met because the square root of AVE is greater than all correlation coefficients within each factor, and the MSV is less than the AVE for all factors.

Additionally, before testing the hypotheses of the study through SEM, the psychometric properties of the constructs in the hypothesised model were checked with a CFA of the item covariance matrix with the maximum likelihood estimation process in AMOS. The aim of conducting a CFA is to test whether a provided measurement model is valid and has the best fit. The researcher considered the values of residual means squared errors (RMSEA), goodness of fit index (GFI), and comparative fit index (CFI). In general, the model fit was acceptable, and the hypothesised measurement model showed the best fit with the data ($\chi^2 = 760.518$, $df = 205$, $GFI = 0.905$, $CFI = 0.923$, $RMSEA = 0.069$).

Table 5-7 Descriptive statistics and correlations among constructs

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	HRM	KS	TP	ARO
HRM	3.07	0.75				
KS	4.01	0.78	0.277**			
TP	3.87	0.68	0.290**	0.560**		
ARO	2.31	0.96	0.325**	0.190**	0.074	

HRM = Human Resource Management; KS = Knowledge sharing; TP = Trust in peers; ARO = Academic research output. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5-8 Reliability and validity measures for the proposed model

Reliability and validity measures					Correlation Coefficients			
Factor	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	ARO	TP	KS	HRM
ARO	0.808	0.586	0.148	0.828	0.765*			
TP	0.825	0.546	0.466	0.861	0.039	0.739*		
KS	0.765	0.619	0.466	0.769	0.225	0.683	0.787*	
HRM	0.905	0.709	0.148	0.936	0.385	0.271	0.344	0.842*

CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; MSV = maximum shared variances; MaxR(H) = maximum reliability; ARO = academic research output; TP = Trust in peers; KS = knowledge sharing; HRM = human resource management. * is the square root of AVE.

SEM was used to test the research model. This approach is appropriate when estimating theoretically derived paths amongst multiple independent and dependent variables. In addition, it can deal with both reflective and formative constructs (Bollen, 2014). Scale values for each variable were calculated and corrected for random measurement error to reduce the ratio of parameters to observations in estimating the model.

5.6.2 Results of the SEM model analysis

Figure 5-1 and Table 5-9 explain significant parameter estimates for the structural equation model. Substantial positive effects were identified for all the tested relationships.

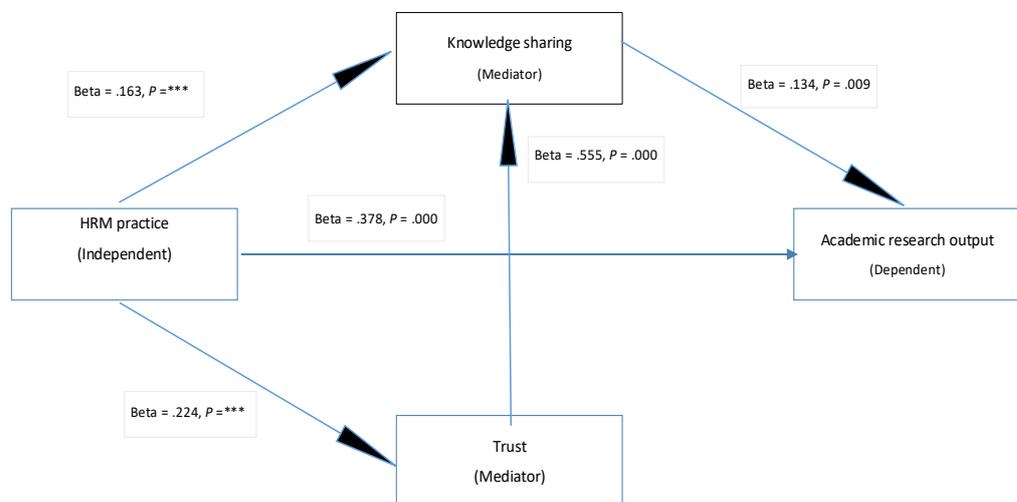


Figure 5-1 Parameter estimates for the structural equation model. * P < .001**

Table 5-9 Standardised estimates of the research model

Endogenous variable	Exogenous variable	Std Est	S.E.	C.R.	P
TP	← HRM practices	.224	.039	5.736	***
KS	← HRM practices	.163	.037	4.420	***
KS	← TP	.555	.038	14.432	***
ARO	← KS	.134	.051	2.624	0.009
ARO	← HRM practices	.378	.053	7.168	***

TP = Trust in peers; HRM = Human resource management; KS = Knowledge sharing; ARO = Academic research output; Std Est = standardised estimate; S.E. = standard error; C.R. =critical ratio. *** $P < .001$

The results supported Hypothesis 1. The estimate of the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output was positive and significant ($\beta = .394, P = .000$). Hypothesis 3, the direct relationship between trust in peers and knowledge sharing, was also supported; it was positive and significant ($\beta = .555, P = .000$). Moreover, there was an indirect effect between HRM practices and academic research output via knowledge sharing, which supports Hypothesis 2 (partial mediation) ($\beta = .163, P = .000$; $\beta = .226, P = .000$; effect = $.163 \times .226 = .036$). Additionally, there was an indirect effect between HRM practices and academic research output via trust in peers and knowledge sharing (partial mediation) ($\beta = .224, P = .000$; $\beta = .555, P = .000$; $\beta = .226, P = .000$; effect = $.224 \times .555 \times .226 = .028$), which supports Hypothesis 4.

5.6.3 Further test

The researcher also used the bootstrapping technique to examine the mediation effects variables. Bootstrapping (with 2000 sample) tested the conditional indirect effect of HRM practices on academic research output through knowledge sharing, trust in peers, and both trust in peers and knowledge sharing (Table 5-10). The reasons for using the bootstrapping technique are that it is robust in providing accurate estimation (Cheung & Lau, 2008) and has been used in many recent studies (see Saheem et al.,

2017). The following statistical measures were computed: bootstrap estimates of standard error (SE); an approximate SE for the standard error (SE-SE); the mean across bootstrap samples of the quantity being estimated (mean); the difference between the average of 2000 estimates obtained from 2000 bootstrap samples and the single view obtained from the original sample (bias); and an approximate SE for the bias estimate (SE-Bias) (Table 5-10).

Table 5-10 Indirect effects examined with bootstrapping (B = 2000)

Parameter	Est	Std	S.E.	C.R.	<i>P</i>	SE	SE-SE	M	Bias	SE-Bias
TP ← HRM	.224	.039	.039	5.736	***	.043	.001	.223	.001	.001
KS ← HRM	.163	.037	.037	4.420	***	.038	.001	.162	-.001	.001
KS ← TP	.555	.038	.038	14.432	***	.046	.001	.557	.002	.001
ARO ← KS	.134	.051	.051	2.624	.009	.061	.001	.133	.001	.001
ARO ← HRM	.378	.053	.053	7.168	***	.059	.001	.381	.002	.001

TP = Trust in peers; HRM = Human resource management practices; KS = Knowledge sharing; ARO = Academic research output; Est = Estimate; Std = standardised; M = mean; S.E = standard error; C.R. =critical ratio. ****P* <.001.

The results demonstrated that knowledge sharing alone, and both trust in peers and knowledge sharing, are essential mediators between HRM practices and academic research output.

The researcher also calculated the bias-corrected percentile and accelerated bootstrap at 95% confidence intervals for conditional indirect effect (Table 5-11). All mediator variables (from HRM practices to academic research output through knowledge sharing, and from HRM practices to academic research output through trust in peers and knowledge sharing) were significant and positive.

Table 5-11 Estimate/Bootstrap bias – corrected percentile method

Parameter	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P
HRM to KS to ARO	.022	.005	.049	.014
HRM to TP to KS to ARO	.017	.004	.037	.015

Note: HRM = Human resource management; KS = Knowledge sharing; ARO = Academic research output; TP = Trust in peers

5.7 Discussion and implications

This study explored how HRM practices affect academic research output. Accordingly, the study tested four hypotheses that propose a positive association between academic research output and (1) HRM practices, (2) HRM practices through knowledge sharing, (3) trust in peers and knowledge sharing, and (4) HRM practices through trust in peers and knowledge sharing. The results of the statistical analysis indicated that, in the context of the Saudi Arabian higher education sector, specifically in publicly funded universities, HRM practices influence academic research output directly and indirectly through knowledge sharing and trust in peers and knowledge sharing. The four hypotheses were all statistically supported. These findings support the existing literature that argues that HRM practices are associated with organisational performance (e.g., Saridakis et al., 2017; Veth et al., 2017). The results confirm a new dimension of the relationship between HRM practices and academic performance in the context of Saudi public universities.

Several reasons might account for these outcomes. Saudi universities depend highly on a non-national academic workforce. Over the past few years they have striven to develop a robust recruitment and selection system and follow a global recruitment strategy to attract high-performing research scholars in order to support their new research agenda. These activities accord with the government's aim of at least five publicly funded Saudi universities among the top 200 universities globally by 2030. This national aspiration is set out in the Vision 2030 of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Also, as part of the diversification of the economy away from oil dependence, the global recognition of Saudi universities will attract international students and

research funding and allow Saudi Arabia to become competitive in the global higher education market. As previously noted, 63% of the professorial positions in Saudi universities are occupied by non-national staff (Ministry of Education, 2019). This statistic acts as an important incentive for Saudi universities to develop appropriate recruitment and selection techniques to attract the best academic talent.

Further, some Saudi universities have established a Deanship of Academic Development and Quality. The Deanship is responsible for providing continuous training and development opportunities to improve academics' research skills. Other measures to increase research capabilities include attractive annual leave arrangements and flexible workloads (King Fahad University of Petroleum & Minerals, 2019). In addition, the performance appraisal system places great emphasis on increasing research output. Notably, most of the non-national academic staff have renewable work contracts based on performance, which might have both positive and negative effects.

The findings indicate that to increase the research output within the Saudi university context, knowledge sharing and trust in peers are important factors. The study's findings are robust because the quantitative data confirmed the findings of the qualitative data. The qualitative data revealed about 89% of the participants believed that knowledge sharing is an essential factor in improving their research output. The qualitative data also showed that 75% of the participants considered trust in peers is another factor needed to increase research output. The quantitative findings demonstrated that both knowledge sharing and trust in peers are essential factors to mediate the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output. Thus, establishing a knowledge-sharing environment and an atmosphere of trust in peers are crucial factors within the context of Saudi universities in order to increase the research output of academic staff.

The study shows that, in order to increase their research output, academic staff need to be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. They should receive training and development to develop trust in peers and engage in more knowledge sharing. The study explored HRM practices within Saudi

universities to determine if academic staff believe that the HRM practices align with improved performance. The findings showed that about half of both the non-Saudi academic staff (52.9 %) and the Saudi academic staff (47.8 %) believed that knowledge sharing and trust in peers are essential in improving research output. Therefore, HRM practices within Saudi universities should aim to develop trust and knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is an essential factor in mediating the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output. These findings are consistent with those of other studies that found HRM practices can influence employee knowledge sharing, which ultimately increases employee output (Chong, Yuen, & Gan, 2014). Therefore, Saudi universities must continue to implement HR practices that create a better environment and knowledge sharing culture (Fauzi et al., 2019). Identifying and recognising knowledge-sharing attitudes and behaviour as part of the key performance indicators (KPIs) for academic staff in Saudi universities would further improve academic staff research output.

5.8 Chapter summary and limitations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the associations among HRM practices, trust in peers, knowledge sharing, and academic research output in the unique context of the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. The empirical findings showed a positive and direct relationship between HRM practices and academic research output. In addition, the results demonstrated a positive indirect relationship between HRM practices and academic research output through knowledge sharing alone, and through trust in peers and knowledge sharing. Previous research on the relationship between HRM and organisational performance has been conducted primarily in Western countries, mostly in manufacturing contexts. This study extends the analysis to the higher education context in a Middle Eastern country where the culture and the institutional setting differ substantially from those of the West.

Despite the contribution of the findings to the literature, some limitations of the study must be acknowledged. The study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the possibility of causal connections among variables (Spector, 1994). A longitudinal design would help to strengthen the possibility of reverse causation and would assess variables over time. In addition, future studies should consider other mediating or mediator variables such as university culture, university climate, and legal and regulatory environments. Further, this study used only one dependent variable, academic research output. Future research could consider other variables such as teaching performance and community service or engagement, which are part of the work of academic staff. Finally, the dependent variable in this study was measured by the number of publications; future studies could measure the quality of academic research instead of the number of publications.

The next chapter concludes the thesis and presents recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1 Chapter outline

This chapter presents a summary of the research study. Each chapter of the thesis is summarised before presenting the main findings related to each objective and discussing the contributions, implications and limitations of the research. Finally, recommendations for future research are made.

6.2 Summary of the thesis

This thesis examined several issues related to strategic HRM within publicly funded universities in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. The main objectives of this research were:

- To explore tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions.
- To explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered.
- To examine the link between HRM practices and university performance.

Chapter 1 provided a general overview of the research, followed by an explanation of the research questions and objectives. The chapter summarised the main results, significance and contributions of the research. In addition, it presented the thesis structure.

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive literature review of the Saudi Arabian context. It discussed relevant factors, including the geography, demographics, structure of the Government of Saudi Arabia, and the economy of Saudi Arabia. The chapter also described the culture, traditions and religion of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi education system. In addition, it explained the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques' Overseas Scholarship Program of Saudi Arabia, including the future of the scholarship program and Saudi higher education. The chapter also provided an overview of human resource departments within the higher education sector, specifically in publicly funded universities.

Chapter 3 (relates to Essay 1) addressed Objective 1 of the research, exploring the tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions. It discussed the literature on strategic HRM and the benefits of aligning HRM practices to business strategies. The chapter explained the evolution of HRM function, which has been categorised into three phases: the administrative, HRM practices and HRM strategy phases. Chapter 3 also discussed the literature on the notion of HR development and strategic HRM advancement. It discussed

and integrated the research findings with the extant literature, including studies about the development of HRM processes and practices.

Chapter 4 (relates to Essay 2) addressed Objective 2 of the research, which was to explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers (non-Saudi academic staff) in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered. It discussed the literature on HRD in general and in Saudi Arabian higher education in particular. The chapter also explained the theoretical framework for the study, equity theory. Literature relating to the leadership of HRD and HRM practices in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector was presented. The chapter then discussed the research methodology and data analysis before discussing the study's findings and the related literature. The study supported the provision of equitable HRD opportunities for both Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in conjunction with establishing structures to support knowledge sharing among these two groups.

Chapter 5 (relates to Essay 3) answered Objective 3 of the research: to examine the link between HRM practices and university performance, particularly academic research output. The chapter presented the literature about the relationship between HRM practices and performance, illustrating the inconsistencies in specific HRM practices that are linked to organisational performance. The literature on the HRM linkage with organisational performance has focused on various elements of performance: financial outcomes, operational performance, and employee attitudes and behaviours. The chapter also discussed the literature on the importance and different ways of measuring academic research output. This study tested four hypotheses: (1) HRM practices have a significant relationship with academic research output, (2) HRM practices have an indirect effect on academic research output through knowledge sharing, (3) a positive relationship exists between trust in peers and knowledge sharing, and (4) trust in peers and knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output. The chapter presented the research methods and data analysis used in the study. The four hypotheses were statistically supported by the findings. Finally, the findings and implications of the study were discussed.

6.3 Summary of main findings

The research findings addressed the research objectives above and were presented in chapters 3, 4 and 5 (essays 1, 2 and 3). The findings are summarised here.

6.3.1 Objective 1: To explore tensions and challenges are associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions.

Strategic HRM research is dominated by applied research in developed or advanced economic contexts. However, developing economic contexts require theories and concepts similar to those applied in developed and advanced economic contexts in order to fully develop their HRM practices and processes. Applying strategic HRM in Saudi Arabia will create tensions and challenges in HRM practices and processes. Thus, studying and understanding the current HRM practices and processes is essential before starting to make changes. The first study in this doctoral research explored what tensions and challenges undermine the effective management and organisation of HRM processes and practices in Saudi higher education institutions. In addition, the study explored the opportunities for strategic HRM alignment and how they might benefit Saudi Arabian higher education institutions.

The findings uncovered five themes (Figure 6-1). The first theme is the duplication of HRM functions and the role ambiguity of HRM departments. This theme illustrated overlap in designing and supervising HR functions. The findings indicated that no single unit or department designs or supervises HRM functions; rather, HRM functions are fragmented among different departments and units.

The second theme is the limited coordination between departments and units. The results indicated a lack of coordination between the different units and departments that supervise and design HRM functions. This deficiency obstructs efficiency, undermining the effectiveness of HRM processes and practices. The third theme is the power struggle in decision making. Various

departments perform similar HRM functions, which ultimately creates conflict between the HRM department and other units and departments. Thus power struggles occur about who has the final authority to make decisions on HRM functions such as staff recruitment and selection, training and development, and employee promotion. The study found that this conflict has narrowed the role of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs. The Deanship was established to design and supervise all HRM functions, but now has limited or no opportunities to perform its mandated duties.

The fourth theme is the loss of credibility and recognition. The findings showed that lack of recognition by other units limits the role of HRM departments. Currently, HRM functions are mainly designed and performed by other units; the HRM department mainly performs basic administrative tasks such as issuing employment letters and advertising job vacancies.

The fifth theme is governance regulatory requirements. The results indicated Saudi Arabian higher education lack autonomy to implement HRM policies. Links between Saudi universities and ministries such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Civil Services hinder policy implementation. The Ministry of Education primarily establishes regulations on educational issues within Saudi Arabia, which must be followed by publicly funded universities and complicate HRM operations. The lack of autonomy and the link between Saudi universities and other ministries cause delays in implementing some HRM practices.

The combination of issues uncovered by this research has led to the HR departments (Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs) within Saudi universities performing basic administrative HRM functions only. Thus they are not strategic partners in managing HRM or supporting the long-term goals and strategies of universities.

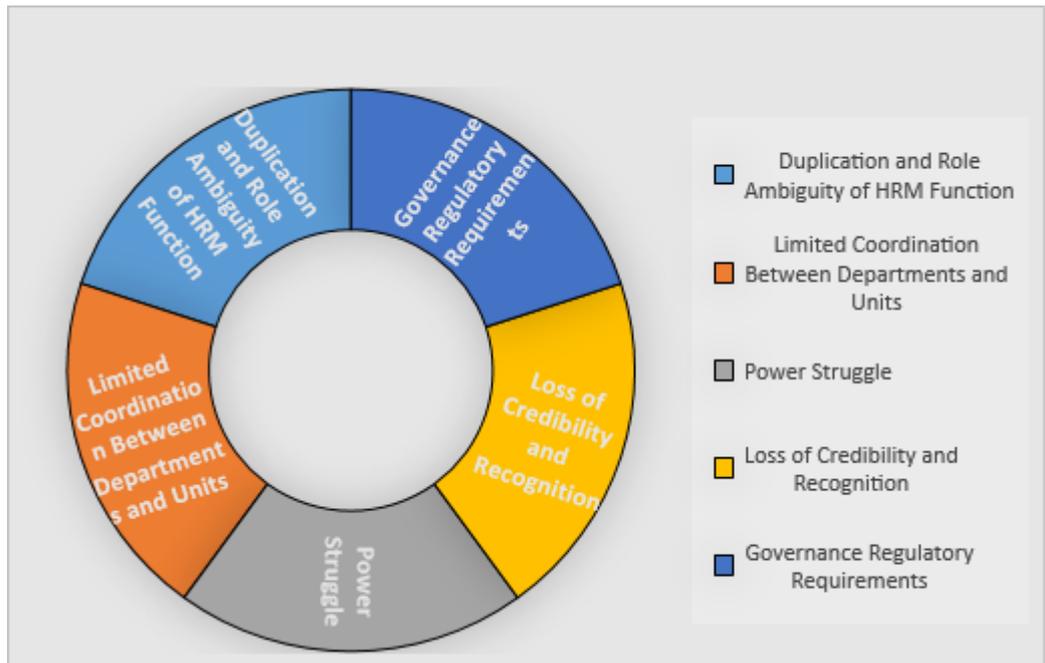


Figure 6-1 Tensions and challenges around achieving strategic HRM in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector

6.3.2 Objective 2: To explore equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered.

Saudi Arabia has many foreign-born (non-Saudi) workers, who comprise about 12.2 million of the total population (General Authority for Statistics, 2019). In the higher education sector, foreign-born workers constitute about 39% of the workforce. However, foreign-born workers occupy about 63% of the professorial positions. The employment conditions for these academic foreign-born staff differ from those of Saudi nationals: the former group works under renewable contracts, while Saudi staff have permanent or tenured positions. This study explored equity issues through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered.

The findings uncovered three themes (Figure 6-2). The first theme is procedural differences. The results indicated foreign-born workers have limited, sometimes no, financial support to engage in international conferences, workshops and symposiums. They receive only administrative approval to attend. In contrast, Saudi staff have more opportunities and

financial support to attend and participate in such professional development activities. The results confirmed that Saudi universities do not invest money in foreign-born staff because they work under renewable contracts and thus will eventually leave the university. Foreign-born workers noted that the length of time to obtain approval to participate in international training and development programs is longer for them than for Saudi academic staff. Further, although internal training and development programs are available for all staff, the findings suggested these programs are not strategically planned and do not meet staff needs.

The second theme is managerial discretion. As noted above, HRM functions are designed and managed by various uncoordinated units. This situation has led to managerial discretion when selecting academic staff for training, and contributes to a preference for “in-group” members from extended family and tribes.

The third theme is limited HRD opportunities for foreign-born nationals. The university places the same work expectations on all staff, whether Saudi or foreign-born nationals. However, foreign-born nationals perceived they have limited opportunities for training and career development. They thought that the system breeds inequality and differentiates between Saudi and foreign-born workers.

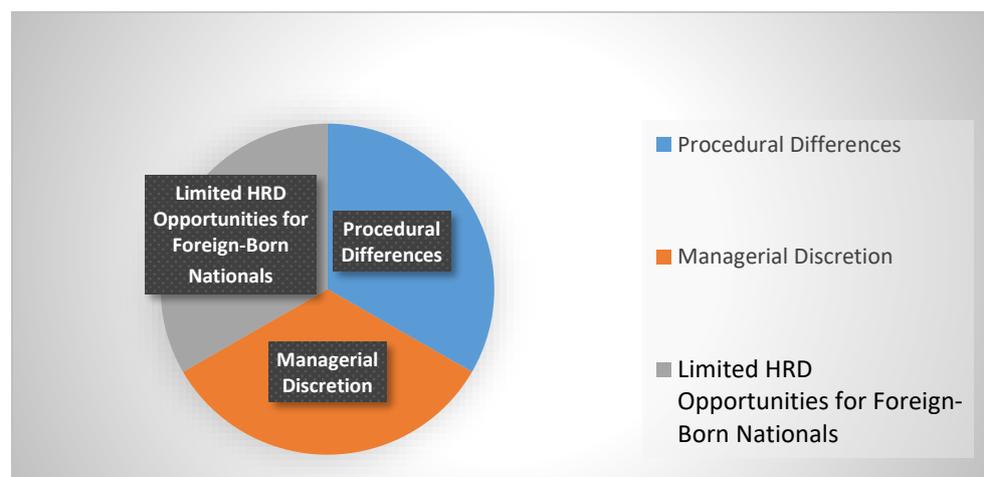


Figure 6-2 Factors affecting equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in Saudi public universities

6.3.3 Objective 3: To examine the link between HRM practices and university performance

The Saudi Arabian higher education sector seeks to improve research output to meet the Saudi Vision 2030. The Saudi Vision 2030 aims to improve the country overall, and the education sector is a central part of the vision. The vision has announced that improving research output is important to help the country diversify its economy, solve social issues, and improve the international ranking of Saudi universities. The vision states that, by 2030, at least five publicly funded universities will be among the top 200 universities in the global rankings. Prior literature has demonstrated the positive relationship between HRM practices and organisational performance (Safavi & Karatepe, 2018; Veth et al., 2017). Therefore, this study examined the link between HRM practices and academic research output within the context of Saudi Arabian higher education.

Four hypotheses were examined:

H1: HRM practices have a significant relationship with academic research output.

H2: HRM practices have an indirect effect on academic research output through knowledge sharing.

H3: There is a positive relationship between trust in peers and knowledge sharing.

H4: Trust in peers and knowledge sharing mediate the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output.

The findings supported the four hypotheses. The results demonstrated that knowledge sharing and trust in peers are important factors that increase academic staff research output. Also, the study suggested that Saudi universities should design HRM practices that promote knowledge sharing and trust in peers among academic staff..

6.4 Research contribution

This research makes several contributions to the literature on strategic HRM and performance in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. First, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, this research is one of the first attempts to explore the tensions and challenges that undermine the effective management and organisation of HRM processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education. Hence this study contributes to the literature on strategic HRM by providing evidence from a unique context that lacks management research (Harbi et al., 2017; Moideenkutty et al., 2011).

Second, the findings of this research demonstrated that the HR departments in Saudi publicly funded universities do not act as strategic partners in assisting Saudi universities to achieve sustainable goals. Rather, HR departments currently perform only administrative tasks.

Third, the study contributes to the contextual body of knowledge about HRD in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector by exploring equity among Saudi national and foreign-born university academic staff through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered. There is a dearth of HRD studies in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in general, and particularly in Saudi Arabia (Harbi et al., 2017; Moideenkutty et al., 2011). Because most of the GCC countries rely heavily on foreign-born workers, the study's implications may extend to other country contexts.

Fifth, the study created a framework that supports providing equitable HRD opportunities for both Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers. This framework can be used to tackle perceived inequity and develop avenues for increasing knowledge sharing.

Sixth, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is one of the first studies to examine the link between HRM practices and academic research output in a developing Middle Eastern country. Prior research on the relationship between HRM and performance has provided empirical evidence from developed economies and countries that mainly concerns financial performance. This study contributes to the literature by providing evidence

from a developing country, where the culture and organisational settings are different from Western contexts (Al-bahussin & El-garaihy, 2013; Fawzi & Almarshed, 2013). Thus this study contributes to the limited literature on the relationship between HRM practices, trust, knowledge sharing and academic research output, particularly in GCC countries.

Seventh, and finally, the study contributes to theoretical understanding of the linkage between HRM and academic research output in a higher education context.

6.5 Implications for higher education policy

The study explored three aspects of strategic HRM within the Saudi Arabian higher education sector. First, it explored tensions and challenges associated with the devolvement of HR processes and practices in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions. Second, it examined equity among Saudi nationals and foreign-born workers in a university work setting through the lens of how human resource development (HRD) opportunities are administered. Third, it examined the link between HRM practices and university performance. The results of this research revealed that HRM practices are not well designed and the role of HR departments is not sustainable in the long term. In addition, there is perceived inequity about HRD for Saudi and non-Saudi academic staff within Saudi universities. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that HRM practices can influence academic research output and showed that knowledge sharing and trust in peers are significant factors in assisting academic staff to increase their research output. Therefore, decision-makers in Saudi higher education should examine and assess these findings in order to make positive changes in the policies and strategies about these issues.

The findings presented in this thesis underline several import issues for the leaders of Saudi universities. First, the findings draw attention to the importance of redesigning HRM practices and HR departments. The study revealed that HRM practices are managed and designed by various units and departments with no coordinated approach, which leads to inefficient practices.

Second, the perceived inequity between Saudi and non-Saudi academic staff regarding the opportunities and support for training and development programs is a serious issue that needs attention from the leaders of Saudi universities. As noted previously, non-Saudi academic staff occupy 63% of the professorial positions in Saudi publicly funded universities. However, they receive little or no financial support to attend and participate in international conferences, symposiums and workshops. In contrast, the smaller proportion of Saudi academic staff do receive financial support to attend and participate in international professional development opportunities. The terms of faculty appointments need reforming if Saudi universities want to improve their research performance. They need to give equal opportunities to both staff groups, regardless of their citizenship. Support for academic staff to attend and participate in international conferences, workshops and symposiums should be granted equally to all academic staff based on their overall performance rather than their citizenship.

Third, the findings showed that Saudi universities do not want to invest in non-Saudi academic staff, especially giving them financial support for participating in international conferences. Non-Saudi academic staff work under renewable contracts, so the university is reluctant to invest in them because they might leave the university at any time. As noted above, the majority of professorial appointments are held by non-Saudi academic staff. By investing in the professional development of these staff, Saudi universities will improve their research output and ultimately the university's research performance. Simultaneously, developing an environment that encourages mutual knowledge sharing among non-Saudi academic staff and their Saudi colleagues is vital. Developing HRM practices that foster knowledge sharing (e.g. including knowledge sharing in performance management) will assist this process. In addition, the cumulative experience and research skills of non-Saudi academic staff could be harnessed through developing mentorship programs to improve the research skills and performance of junior Saudi academic staff by matching them with a senior colleague who shares similar research interests.

Fourth, the findings indicated that HRM can influence academic research output. Trust in peers and knowledge sharing are essential factors to improve academic research output in the context of Saudi higher education. Therefore, Saudi universities should design and implement HRM practices that encourage trust among colleagues and knowledge sharing.

6.6 Study limitations and future research

Although the study makes a number of contributions to the literature on strategic HRM and performance in the Saudi Arabian higher education sector, it has some limitations, and also raised issues that require further investigation.

First, the study investigated the tensions and challenges linked with the development of HR practices in Saudi public universities. The context of the research has a unique culture. Also, the structure of Saudi higher education might differ from other contexts. Hence the findings of the study are difficult to generalise to other settings. Future research should examine the role of HR practices in other countries and contexts. Investigation of the tensions and challenges associated with the development of HR practices and the role of the HR department in Saudi privately owned universities is also warranted.

Second, the study explored the inequity among Saudi and non-Saudi academic staff in Saudi publicly funded universities through the lens of how HRD opportunities are administered. In other words, it focused only on HRD practices. Future research should explore other management practices in Saudi publicly funded universities, as well as inequity among Saudi and non-Saudi academic staff in Saudi privately owned universities.

Third, the current study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the possibility of discovering causal connections among variables (Spector, 1994). A longitudinal design would strengthen the possibility of uncovering reverse causation and assess variables over time.

Fourth, the study examined the relationship between HRM and academic research output through two mediating variables: trust in peers and

knowledge sharing. Future studies should consider other mediating or mediator variables such as university culture, university climate, and legal and regulatory environment. Further, this study used only one dependent variable, academic research output. Future research could consider other variables such as teaching performance, community services or engagement, which are part of the work of academic staff. Finally, the dependent variable in this study was measured by the number of publications; the quality of academic research could be measured by other variables.

Fifth, the current study was limited to publicly funded Saudi universities. Future studies should consider private universities within the context of Saudi Arabian higher education or other similar contexts.

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APPENDIX A

Example of participants' voices from the interview data

University	Key Informants	Code
A	HR managers	"We are trying to recruit and select academic staff from different countries, who can add value to our research output."
D	HR manager	"Research output or strong research profile is one of the main elements that we consider in recruiting new academic staff."
C	HR manager	"We can't ignore the importance of research output, as it one of the main factors to enhance our reputation in the international rankings. So, we try to pick and recruit new staff who has strong research experience."
F	Dean	"There is a research centre in our college that tries to enhance the research environment inside our college."
A	Head of Department	"In each college at our university, there is a research centre. This centre aims to facilitate academic staff for doing research."
E	Lecturer	"Our university encourages us to do research and provides competitive research environment among all staff within the university. For example, the Deanship of Scientific Research rewards yearly the academic staff who have produced high-quality research."
B	Lecturer	"The university, through the Deanship of Library Affairs, supports us to research by giving access to top journals and publishers."
F	Lecturer	"Research output is one of the main factors that the Head of our department focuses on, especially when he fills the performance evaluation."
A	Lecturer	"I usually share my knowledge with my colleagues to benefit them, and at the same time, I learn from them."
B	Dean	"We run regular workshops and seminars inside our school. Those activities encourage

		us to share knowledge and learn and benefit each other”
C	Head of Department	“We try to encourage knowledge sharing culture in our department, and we give recognition to any staff who initiatives to run a workshop or seminar to benefit his or her colleagues.”
C	Lecturer	“I trust all my colleagues and trust their abilities and skills in conducting research.”
B	HR manager	“We try to motivate our staff to share knowledge with their colleagues and with university management.”
D	Lecturer	“Knowledge sharing is grounded in our religion and culture. So, I love to share my knowledge and experiences with all my colleagues.”
E	HR manager	“Our staff are from different countries around the world. We aim to recruit and select the best out of the best to achieve our goals and research output is one of our main goals.”
C	Dean	“Our religion supports us to seek and share knowledge. Also, in our culture, we want people to take benefits from the knowledge we have.”
F	HR manager	“We try to recruit academic staff who have a strong research profile. Also, we provide internal and external course and workshop to enhance academic staff research skills. Moreover, we reward and encourage proactive academic staff in research.”
A	Dean	“In our school, we try to enhance the level of trust among us (colleagues) because I think the more, we trust each other, the more will share knowledge and benefit each other”
E	Lecturer	“Our university supports us to share our knowledge and tries to create a good research environment and rewards academic staff, who publish in top journals.”

APPENDIX B

Dear Faculty Member:

I am a PhD candidate at Curtin University – Australia in Human Resource Management and focusing mainly on the relationship between HRM practices and academic research output of public funded universities in Saudi Arabia.

This survey contains four sections, which will take less than 6 minutes to complete. Please read each statement and then circle the number or tick the box, which shows how you feel. If you feel uncomfortable in answering certain questions, please feel free to disregard them.

Your participation is strictly voluntary and all data that you provide will be confidential. Only members of the research team will have access to the data which will be kept secure. Participants may withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences, and do not need to provide a reason. By completing out the survey, you are consenting to participate.

This study has been approved by Curtin University, Australia (HRE2017-0005). Please contact the researcher named below to have any questions answered or if you require further information about this project.

Note:

1. This survey targets only academic staff.
2. Deans, Heads of Departments or Representatives of the Deanship of Faculty and Personnel Affairs please answer from the perspective of the academic staff you support in your university.

I hope you will consider participating in this project.

Thanking you in advance

Name: Mohammad Al-Qahtani

Email: alqahtan@postgrad.curtin.edu.au

Mobile: +61498801574

Section one: Demographic information:		
Language		
Arabic	English	
Institution Name		
King Saud University	King Khalid University	Jazan University
Islamic University	Taibah University	Al Baha University
King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals	Taif University	University of Tabuk
King Abdulaziz University	Qassim University	Najran University
Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud University	University of Hail	Northern Borders University
King Faisal University	AlJouf University	Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University
Umm Al-Qura University	King Saud bin Abdulaziz University of Health Sciences	Shagra University
Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University	University of Dammam	Jeddah University
Al-Majmaah University	Saudi Electronic University	University of Bisha
University of Hafr Al-Batin		
Gender		
Male	Female	
Nationality		
Saudi	Non-Saudi, Please specify	
Academic Status		
Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor
Lecturer	Demonstrator	
Academic Position		

Dean of Academic and Personnel Affairs	Dean of College	Vice Dean			
Head of department / unit	Faculty member (No Administrative Role)	other: please specify			
Age					
Under 30 years	31- 40	41 – 50			
51-60	61 and over				
Years' Experience					
Less than 5 years	5 – 10 years	11 – 15 years			
16 – 20 years	21 – 25 years	More than 26 years			
Discipline					
Sariah and Fundamentals of Religion	Computer and Information Sciences	Arabic Language			
Nursing	Pharmacy	College of Medicine			
Food and Agricultural Sciences	Language and Translations	Business			
Education	Engineering	Applied Medical Science			
Dentistry	Sciences	Law and Political Science			
other, Please specify					
<p>Section Two: Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices:</p> <p>The section comprises of 21 questions that measure how HRM practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, reward and compensation and performance appraisal are applied in your university.</p>					
Questionnaires	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5

Recruitment and Selection						
1	Applicants are made aware of their job responsibilities during the recruitment process.					
2	The university tends to hire people with problem – solving skills.					
3	The university tends to hire people with the ability to work with others.					
4	The university tends to hire people who suit the values of the university.					
5	The recruitment and selection procedure in this university is efficient.					
6	The university's recruitment and selection practices are effective in filling vacancies with the right people.					
Training and Development						
7	I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills at this university through training and development programmes such as (seminars, workshops, conferences attendance, sabbatical leaves, and research funding.).					
8	I am satisfied with the quality of training and development programmes available in this university.					
9	The university's training and development activities largely address long-term objectives.					
10	The training and development opportunities help staff improve their research productivity.					
Reward and compensation						
11	The university recognises the link between how well I conduct research and the likelihood of receiving high performance appraisal ratings.					
12	The university recognises the link between how well I conduct research and the likelihood of receiving an increase in pay/salary.					
13	The university recognises the link between how well I conduct research and the likelihood of receiving promotion.					
14	I am satisfied with the level of recognition I receive when I produce good research.					
15	The university's reward and compensation scheme/package					

	strongly emphasizes academic' research productivity.					
16	Pay increases are based on group performance rather than personal performance.					
Performance Appraisal						
17	This university conducts performance appraisal with clear performance criteria and procedures.					
18	This university evaluates my performance accurately					
19	The current performance appraisal system is useful.					
20	The current performance appraisal system is fair.					
21	I am satisfied with the current performance appraisal system.					

Section Three: Employee Perceptions:

This section consists of 8 items measuring the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding two construct including knowledge sharing and trust in peers.

Questionnaires		Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neutral 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
Knowledge sharing						
1	I usually share research knowledge and information with my colleagues orally or in writing.					
2	I usually share my research creativities with my colleagues.					
3	I usually help my colleagues solve research related problems.					
Trust in Peers						
4	I have full confidence in the research skills of my colleagues.					
5	I can rely on my colleagues while doing a joint research.					

6	I can rely on my colleagues for assistance in conducting research when in need.					
7	Most of my colleagues are reliable in providing assistance in conducting research.					
8	Most of my colleagues get on research activities willingly.					

Section Four: Academic Research Output:

In this section, please indicate the number of your research publications over the last five years in your present university for each of the following:

Items		0	1-2	3-4	5-6	Above 6
1	Number of published articles in referred journals.					
2	Number of published articles in professional journals.					
3	Number of presented papers in scientific conferences.					
4	Number of published books.					
5	Number of edited and translated books.					
6	Number of published book chapters.					

Thank you for your cooperation

APPENDIX C

Letter of Permission to Participate in Study

November 16, 2016

As a doctoral candidate at Curtin University in Australia, I am conducting a study to examine the relationship between HRM practices, employee attitudes and academic performance of public funded universities in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of human resource management (HRM) practices on organizational performance. The information that I will gather in this study will play a part to develop and improve the university's performance.

Your university has been selected as a potential and important participant for this study. Your participation is strictly voluntary and all data that you provide will be confidential. The data collected during the interview is confidential and you cannot be identified. Only members of the research team will have access to the data which will be kept secure.

With your permission, interviews and an online survey will be conducted with senior managers or HR managers, line managers and employees from different levels of the organization to explore the alignment between intended, implemented and perceived HR practices and to examine HR practices and performance linkage. The interview will run for approximately 40 minutes and the online survey for around 10 minutes.

Also, after completing the thesis, you will be given your own results that will help you in the future to improve the university performance. I hope you will consider participating in this project.

This study has been approved by Curtin University, Australia. Please contact the researcher named below to have any questions answered or if you require further information about this project.

Research Team:

No	Name	Email	Phone/Mobile
1	Mohammad Alqahtani	alqahtan@postgrad.curtin.edu.au	+61498801574
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4	Dr. Ros Cameron	Ros.Cameron@curtin.edu.au	+61892669153

APPENDIX D

Semi Structured Interview questions

<u>Position:</u>	<u>Age:</u>	<u>Qualification:</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 20 – 30 ○ 31 – 40 ○ 41 - 50 ○ 51 – 60 ○ More than 60 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bachelor Degree ○ Master Degree ○ PhD Degree
<u>Nationality:</u>	<u>Years in the current job:</u>	<u>Years experience in the industry:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Saudi ○ Non – Saudi – specify, ○ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Less than 5 years ○ 5 – 10 years ○ 11 – 15 years ○ 16 – 20 years ○ 21 – 25 years ○ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Less than 5 years ○ 5 – 10 years ○ 11 – 15 years ○ 16– 20 years ○ 21 – 25 years ○

1. What is your current role?
2. What are your main duties in the organization?
3. What are the HR functions (e.g. selection & recruiting, training & development, job design, compensation and performance management) that are applied in your university?
4. Do you have any outsourcing of HR services? If yes? Which services/ functions of the HR are outsourced?
5. Do you have any HR software in operation? If yes, what are they?
6. Do you have any web based HR service delivery?
7. Who is responsible for the design and implementation of HR service?
8. Are HR services centralized and /or devolved to divisions and faculties?
9. What are the main obstacles to HR activities / functions (e.g. selection & recruiting, training & development, job design, compensation, and performance management) that might have impeded the work of the HR

dependent in your university? What are the possible solutions?

10. What are the current trends or roles of HRM departments in your university? Is the HR department a strategic partner in planning the organization's goals? If yes, how? If no, why not?

11. What are the processes you follow to make sure that all intended HR practices are effectively delivered to the line managers (implemented HR practices) and the rest of employees (perceived HR practices)? How do you minimize the gap between intended and implemented and perceived HR practices?

12. Do you have any succession planning in your organization? Yes or No, why?

13. Are you satisfied with your HR systems and functions in your organization? Yes, or No, Why?

14. What are the main employee attitudes that you work hard to enhance in your university which might assist you to achieve high performance in researching and teaching outcomes?

15. Do you conduct employee attitude surveys in your organization? How often do you conduct such this survey?

16. Do you have any avenues for employee voice/ suggestion/ forums and others in your organization?

17. Recently, the Saudi government announced a new vision 2030 to enhance the quality of Saudi universities to have at least 5 universities among top 200 universities around the world. From your experience, is your University planning to be one of them? If yes, how? If no, why not?

18. What are your recommendations / suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the HR activities/ functions in your university?

Thank you for your valuable time and input.